THÉOPHILE
GAUTIER

BORN - 1811
DIED - 1872

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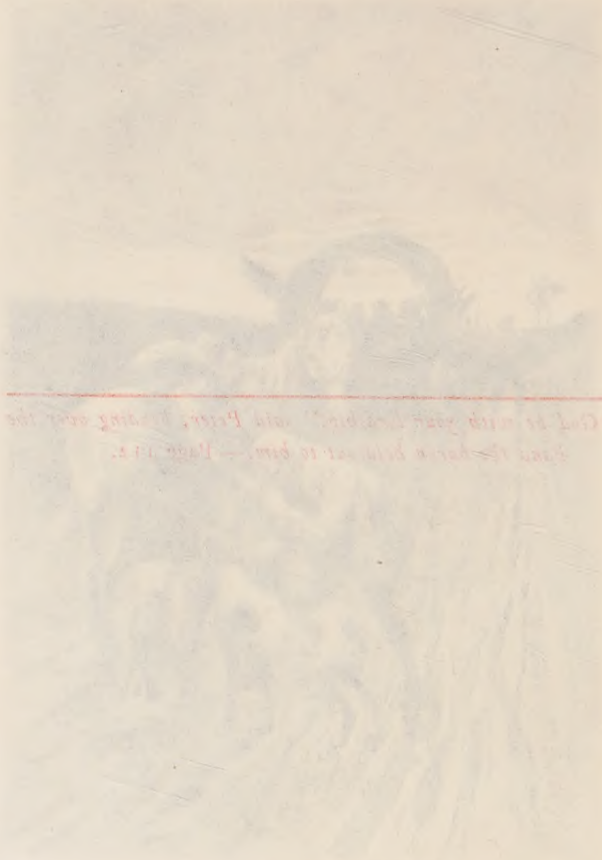
A. Mongin sc.

"God be with your lordship," said Peter, bending over the hand the baron held out to him.— Page 112.



The Gascon Edition

THE COMPLETE WORKS *of*
THÉOPHILE GAUTIER

Volume IX

Captain Fracasse

PARTS I AND II

Translated and Edited by

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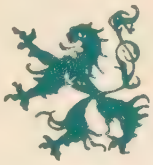

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The Gascon Edition

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By George D. Sproul

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CAPTAIN FRACASSE

Introduction

IT is perhaps too much to say, as does Spoelberch de Lovenjoul, in his admirable "History of the Works of Théophile Gautier," that this novel engrossed the author during his whole life, but it certainly did spread itself over a considerable number of his years of literary labour. He conceived the notion of writing it immediately after "Mademoiselle de Maupin" appeared in print, and, in the opinion of the above quoted critic, the hero is intended as a pendant to the heroine of that most famous and most brilliant story. Here again it is difficult to agree with the learned bibliophile, for there is no very apparent resemblance between the amazingly bold and daringly experimentative maiden and the dullish owner of and resident in Poverty Hall.

Gautier was an adept at promise making, and at promise evading also. Rather, — to be fair to him, — he often hoped to carry out projects that attracted him, and rashly allowed himself to indulge in the pleasure of the announcement of a forthcoming tale, novel, essay on painting, or book of travels. Then other and more imperious calls upon his time and his fertile pen interfered, and the publication was delayed and delayed until publishers and readers alike ceased to hope for the gratification of their tastes. Of all his yet-to-be-written books none, probably, was so long advertised as "Captain Fracasse;" for Eugène Renduel, the publisher of "Mademoiselle de Maupin" and of "Les Jeunes-France," included it in his catalogues as far back as 1836. Two years later, and in 1839, it was again announced as "forthcoming," but it did not turn up for all that, and the public were kept wondering what manner of tale it might be that took so long to elaborate.

In point of fact, there seems to have been no single line of the novel written at that time, nor, indeed, for several years later. The *Presse*, to which Gautier had become a contributor, had every reason to believe that it would pull off the prize for accurate prophecy, and it

joyously informed its readers that the long looked-for work would appear in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, with which Gautier was then on good terms; and that staid periodical itself made a similar proclamation in March, 1846, two months after the prophecy in the *Presse*. But a cloud no bigger than a man's hand came up on the horizon, and ere long Gautier and the *Revue des Deux Mondes* had quarrelled, thus entailing another postponement of the mysterious tale.

This was all to the author's advantage, for no word of the story was yet down on paper, though no doubt much of the novel existed in his mind, and it needed only a definite contract, binding him hard and fast to complete the work in a given time, to induce him to put it into definite and tangible form.

Two other periodicals were added to the collection of hopefuls: the *Revue de Paris* and the *Librairie Nouvelle*, the former announcing it for many months, from October 1853 to March 1856, and the latter also some time between these dates. But neither of these was destined to present "Captain Fracasse" to the expectant public, that piece of good fortune falling to the *Revue Nationale et Étrangère*, founded and managed by Charpentier.

Gautier had written the first chapter of the book, "Poverty Hall," some time in 1854 or 1855, and had handed the copy to the *Revue de Paris*, in fulfilment of his pledge to that periodical, and it had been printed in expectation of the remaining portions coming along. But the *Revue de Paris* was suppressed, and then an agreement was made between the publishers and Gautier and Charpentier, under the terms of which the novel was transferred to the *Revue Nationale et Étrangère*, in which, in the issue of December 25, 1861, "Captain Fracasse" at last made his bow to the public and never left the stage until eighteen months later, when the final chapters appeared on June 10, 1863.

At the end of that year it was republished in book form, in two volumes, and has been frequently republished since then. In 1866 an edition, illustrated by Gustave Doré, was brought out and met with considerable success.

Mme. Judith Gautier, the author's eldest daughter, in an interesting preface written by her for a special edition of her father's works, supplies a curious bit of information concerning the mode of payment adopted in this case. Gautier was paid for each page by itself, the remuneration being twenty francs a page. Each

page was stamped on the back with the word "Paid," so that there should be no mistake about the matter, and the amount thus handed over to the writer was subsequently deducted from the royalty due him.

"Captain Fracasse" is, on the whole, a more carefully wrought tale than most of those Gautier had produced, and for a very good reason: he was not so much hurried in the composition and could bestow greater pains upon the style and the study of the characters. For there are characters in the novel, and not simply, as is too often the case in Romanticist literature, mere puppets and shadows. Sigognac himself, the hero, is perhaps not very living, any more than Isabella, but Blazius unquestionably does live, and becomes associated in the mind with the cognate character in Alfred de Musset's "On ne badine pas avec l'amour." And poor Captain Hector, the Swashbuckler, is a striking figure also, and one not to be forgotten, while Zerbina, though occupying, like these other two, a secondary position, manages to impress herself on the imagination and the memory as she did on the fancy and the roving heart of the Marquis de Bruyères. Lampourde, the hired bravo, the young Duke de Vallombreuse, Yolande herself, who merely flashes through the

novel here and there, have something so human and so true about them that, spite of the melodramatic manner in which they are employed by their creator, they strike one as above the average, very much above the average, of Romanticist characters.

"Captain Fracasse" is a picaresque novel, to a certain extent; it also is a cloak and sword tale, as might be expected from a writer so enamoured of Spain as was Gautier; it has reminiscences of Rabelais, particularly in the luscious descriptions of good cheer and deep drinking, with recollections of Scarron's "Roman comique," and traces of the influence of Walter Scott and the "Bride of Lammermoor." The influence of the great Romanticist chief, Victor Hugo, is also quite noticeable, and the theories and doctrines of the famous Preface to "Cromwell" are here applied and put into practice, especially in the free use of the so-called "grotesque," by which Hugo and his followers set so much store.

The time at which the action of the story is supposed to take place has caused some discussion; not that it is of very great moment, but that Gautier has not specified it clearly. There are, however, abundant indications of the approximate period, in the de-

scriptions of costume, in the use of language, and in the enumeration of dramas then in vogue. But there is a certain convenience, so far as the author himself is concerned, in leaving the date somewhat vague. Suffice it to say that the time is that of the reign of Louis XIII, between 1630 and 1640, a period known to have been a favourite with Gautier, in common with nearly all his fellow-Romanticists.

The plot is not very complex; indeed, it is simple. Two young people meet, fall in love, encounter just enough adventures and incur just enough perils to make the account of that love interesting, and then they marry. There is of course a leading villain and a subordinate one, with a group of tools that serve the former and are invariably worsted in their encounters with the hero. The heroine, on the other hand, falls a prey to the leading villain in a manner calculated to alarm the unpractised reader of novels as to her ultimate fate, but she is of course gallantly rescued at the proper psychological moment by her lover and his band of faithful followers, while a recognition entirely in the taste and spirit of the drama of that day occurs near the end of the book and changes the aspect of the heroine's fortunes. Finally the kindly fairy that has

had somewhat to do with the working out of the plot leads the hero to the precise spot where an enormous treasure had once been buried by a clever Gascon, who must have anticipated precisely such a crisis in the affairs of his descendant.

There is an apparent determination, or intention, at least, on the part of the author, to end everything well, and not to keep the reader too long on the tenter-hooks of suspense. Poetical justice is meted out to the villains, the leading one becoming suddenly converted by the strange recognition that takes place, and turning into a perfectly delightful and useful character, while the minor rascals expiate their sins on the gibbet, and one of them thus gives opportunity for a dramatic and effective scene. It must be owned that the novel is romantic throughout; it is a blossoming of the ideas that the Romanticist writers entertained and upheld; it is of a simplicity of combination in many parts that brings a smile to the lips of the blasé reader of fiction and makes him wonder how people in the sixties could be simple-minded enough to call this high art, and could be interested in it to the extent they were. And having made all these sage and eminently sound reflections, the blasé reader discovers that he also has been caught

by the charm of the book and has been carried away by the easy, lightsome manner of the author.

The hero, Sigognac, is essentially of the Romanticist brood, but with touches that came direct from Gautier's own personality. He did not wish to make him quite a Don Quixote, a Knight of the Doleful Countenance, any more than he cared to make him an insufferable Didier or an eccentric Hernani or an idiot like Ruy Blas. There was to be something of the Quixote about him, just enough of that touch of romance and chivalry which for ever endears the Knight of La Mancha to readers; and something of the Hernani, for Sigognac had to be the representative of an ancient and illustrious race, fallen upon evil days, but maintaining intact its high standard of honour and its wholly unpractical notions; something of the passionate lover, too, that Didier is, but withal a new and personal creation of Gautier's own, and in this it is certain that he has succeeded.

Sigognac recalls Eudore, in Chateaubriand's "Martyrs," for like that interesting young warrior and lover, he is the last of his race. And strange and powerful was the spell wrought upon the imagination of Romanticists by that not uncommon condition: "the last of

his race." The mere fact that a man had no relations seemed to confer a distinction upon him that all the virtues in the world could not have given him. To be the last of one's race forcibly compelled attention and respect, and demanded a hearing for the adventures of the fortunate unfortunate. So Sigognac has the ironic melancholy which befits so highly privileged a character, and he is necessarily dressed in a way to win for him the sympathy and admiration of all tender-hearted females and callow youths; for it is undeniable that a man clad in well-worn, rusty garments extremely out of the fashion, is far more worthy of gaining the love of the fair and the admiration of youths in their salad days than a personage decently clad in the latest mode. Then he is not only ragged and sombre, but he is idle, and that is an all-conquering charm. Out upon the coarse fellow that will not sit down meekly under the stroke of fate and be content to starve picturesquely between his cat and his dog, with his old retainer for a vis-à-vis! Such an one is unworthy to be sung by a poet or chosen as a hero by a romancer. Sigognac duly fulfils the mission of the woe-begone, hungry, out-at-elbows gallant, and the more thoroughly that he has no will in particular and drifts along with the current wherever it

may take him. He redeems himself, however, in the eyes of those who do not admire the good-for-nothing, and determines that, whether noble or commoner, he will not sponge upon the poor strolling players for a living; he manfully makes up his mind to sink his prejudices and aristocratic objections to earning his daily bread, and joins the company as a recruit. From that moment he becomes infinitely more interesting and his adventures are followed with great pleasure.

When he enters upon the practice of the profession he has adopted and makes his first attempt at representing the braggart, cowardly Hector who is the hero of the farce, his performance has suggested to Gautier the sketch of a character destined to be made immortal by a later writer, Alphonse Daudet. Bellombre's description of the personage, Captain Fracasse, whom Sigognac is endeavouring to create, at once recalls that most delightful and entertaining Tartarin de Tarascon, who, like Fracasse, was at once a hero bold and a coward of the whitest liver.

It was a happy thought, even if suggested by Scarron's "Roman comique," that led Gautier to present to his readers a company of strolling players in the early part of the seventeenth century. The Italian players,

first called to France by the Valois kings, favoured by Henry IV and his successor, and expelled late in the days of Louis XIV on account of their impertinent allusion to the great Mme. de Maintenon, were instrumental in developing the French comic drama and some of the best comic actors of that nation, Molière among others, who studied the performances of the celebrated Scaramouch greatly to his own profit. While the monopoly of the higher class of plays granted to the Brotherhood of the Passion in Paris prevented independent companies from performing in the capital save by leave of that very grasping corporation, there was no such restriction in the provinces, and there more than one troupe travelled to and fro, performing comedies, farces, and tragedies, to the great delight of the country folk and of the nobles in their castles and mansions.

It is the life of these wandering players that Gautier has admirably retraced in "Captain Fracasse," and the names of the members of the company of which Sigognac becomes a member, are the typical appellations of the characters then most in favour with the public. The various towns in Italy had furnished characters that were known by the name of the profession or

business of the original: the Doctor, the Pedant, the Merchant; and the soldier, constantly met with in those turbulent days, when war was almost the normal condition of society and pursued by great and small alike, was necessarily an important figure on the stage. Spain and Italy between them gave birth to the "Matamore," the type of the bragging, boastful trooper, whose courage was not always up to the pitch of his pretensions, and whose mishaps proved a source of unending delight to the audiences that crowded the improvised theatres of the day. Gautier has admirably rendered this figure, so popular and so amusing, and he excels in representing the class of people who wandered round in the waggons and chariots one may even now study in the etchings of the famous Callot.

He has had the art, also, of attaching the reader to his characters. Sigognac himself, spite of his too romantic appearance and super-excellence in all things, interests us, and Isabella, sweet and pure amid surroundings well calculated to corrupt a stronger nature than hers, is winsome indeed. The old Pedant, drunken rascal though he be, is a good old fellow, and the Tyrant has something very attractive about him. Of all, however, it is the Swashbuckler, the

Hector of the company, who most enlists sympathy and kindly interest. The butt of all the jokes, the clown of the troupe, there is a genuineness about the man, an earnestness in the discharge of the functions he has assumed that compel respect, and his sad end does not leave the reader unmoved.

Here again Gautier has exhibited rare power. The whole book is full of very striking, dramatic, effective scenes. The arrival of the strollers at Poverty Hall, itself so well described; the brilliant performance at Bruyères; the blizzard and the death of the Swashbuckler — a very strong bit of work; the death of the poor old horse, fighting to the last and gallantly striving to do its duty; the attack of Lampourde, the hired bravo, and the exciting duel between him and Sigognac; the fight in the castle, when the company seeks to rescue Isabella from the clutches of the Duke of Vallombreuse; the dramatic arrival of the Prince his father, and, finally, the death of Agostino, are passages of a very high order of merit.

Of course everything ends happily, and Sigognac and Isabella marry and are happy ever after. And this ending would seem to be the proper one for so romantic a tale, in which neither reader nor author cares to

delve too deep into the realities of life. But it is a curious and interesting fact that this *dénouement* is by no means that which Gautier had originally settled upon.

On July 3, 1878, the *Figaro* published a notice of the comic opera which had been drawn from the novel. The article was by Arnold Mortier, and in it he stated that the "happy ever after" ending of the book was not that which Gautier had first devised. Far from ending brightly, the novel was to have come to a sad close. Vallombreuse did not recover from the wound inflicted upon him by Sigognac, who consequently could no longer wed Isabella. He retired to his ruinous castle, and there wasted away in the company of Miraut, Beelzebub, and old Peter, whom death removed one after another. Sigognac, forgotten by Isabella, who married some other man, at last starved to death in his ancestral home, forsaken and solitary. This enabled Gautier to describe the awful wretchedness of the place, and instead of Happiness Hall to present the Tower of Famine. Mme. Judith Gautier, in the preface referred to above, confirmed the statement. But few will feel disposed to quarrel with the author for having ended his 'novel happily, since, after all,

people, the reading public especially, are quite as fond of the romanesque now as in the days of Romanticism, as is proved by the vogue of the innumerable tales of adventure, love, and war with which the market is flooded nowadays.

The chapters entitled "My Private Menagerie," which follow at the end of this translation of "Captain Fracasse," have no connection with that story. But as they exhibit Gautier — who has dwelt affectionately on the attachment of Miraut and Beelzebub to their master — in the light of a lover of animals as well as of art, they appeared to form a suitable appendix to his best known and most widely read tale. They originally appeared in the *Vogue Parisienne* between January 8 and March 12, 1869, under the title *Histoire de mes bêtes*, and were republished in book form the same year under the title *Ménagerie intime*.

Captain Fracasse

CAPTAIN FRACASSE

I

POVERTY HALL

IN the reign of Louis XIII there stood on the slope of one of the bare hills that rise here and there on the Landes, between Dax and Mont-de-Marsan, a country-seat of the sort commonly met with in Gascony, and which the peasantry call châteaux.

The corners of the building were flanked by two round towers with conical roofs; and on the façade two deeply cut grooves spoke of the anterior existence of a drawbridge, reduced to a state of sinecure by the filling up of the moat. The towers, with their pepper-pot look-outs and their swallow-tailed vanes, gave the manor house quite a feudal aspect, while the deep green of a mantle of ivy that had covered one of them con-

trasted happily with the gray tones of the already old stonework.

A wayfarer observing the place from a distance and noting its pointed gables standing out against the sky, above the broom and the heath, would have come to the conclusion that it was a very suitable habitation for a country nobleman; but, had he drawn nearer, he would have changed his mind. Intrusive mosses and parasitical plants had reduced the way leading to the dwelling from the road, to a narrow white path that looked like a faded galloon upon a well-worn cloak. Two ruts filled with rain water and inhabited by frogs testified to the fact that carriages had once been in the habit of driving that way, while the sense of security exhibited by the batrachians proved that they had long been in possession and were certain of not being disturbed.

Great yellow, leprous-looking patches stained the brown and disjointed tiles on the roofs, the rotten rafters having given way in places. The rusty vanes, pointing each to a different quarter, could no longer revolve; the dormer windows were closed with wooden shutters, weather-worn and split. The barbicans of the towers were filled up with stones; of the twelve

windows on the front, eight were boarded up with planks; the others were glazed with bottle glass that shook in the lead setting at the least breath of wind. The plastering between these windows having come away in flakes, like the skin of an invalid, had laid bare the disjointed bricks, and the dressed stones were worn away by the pernicious influence of the moon. A lintel of stone, the regular rugosities on which denoted an old ornamentation damaged by time and want of care, framed in a door above which showed a dilapidated coat of arms which the cleverest herald could not have made out, and the lambrequins of which curled fantastically with many a break. The leaves of the door still preserved, in their upper part, a few remains of red paint and seemed to blush at their condition of decay. Diamond-headed nails held together the split planking and formed symmetrical designs broken in places. One of the leaves only opened, and proved sufficient for the accommodation of the dwellers, evidently not numerous, in the place. Against the jamb of the door rested a dismantled wheel, falling into pieces, and plainly the last remnant of a carriage that had passed away during the preceding reign. The tops of the chimneys and the corners of the windows disap-

peared under the numbers of swallows' nests, and but for a thin wisp of smoke that rose from a brick flue and twisted like a tendril, as on the drawings of houses sketched by schoolboys on the margin of their text-books, it might have been thought the dwelling was uninhabited. Yet meagre must have been the fare being prepared on that hearth, for a trooper could have produced more smoke with his pipe. This was the single sign of life about the place, which resembled a dying man whose breath alone shows he is still alive.

On pushing open the movable leaf which yielded only under protest, and turned with evident bad temper upon its creaking and rusty hinges, one entered under a sort of groined vaulted archway, older than the rest of the building, and divided by four round mouldings of bluish granite, that met, at their point of intersection, in a projecting stone on which were seen, less deteriorated, the arms carved on the outside: azure, three storks or, — so far as could be made out in the shadow of the archway. To the wall were fixed iron extinguishers blackened by the torches, and iron rings to which visitors' horses were formerly made fast, a very unusual occurrence at this time, if one might judge by the dust accumulated upon them.

From this porch, in which two doors opened, the one leading to the apartments on the ground-floor, the other to a hall that might have been at one time the guard-room — was entered a gloomy, bare, chilly court enclosed by high walls that winter had rayed with long black streaks. In the corners of the court, upon the rubbish fallen from the broken cornices, grew nettles, wild oats, and hemlock, while the paving-stones were set in grass.

At the back a flight of steps, with a stone balustrade ornamented with balls surmounted by spikes, led to a garden lying below the level of the court. The broken and disjointed steps tipped under the feet or were held together only by the filaments of mosses and wall-plants. On the revetment wall of the terrace grew stone-crop, wallflowers, and Jerusalem artichokes.

As for the garden itself, it was quietly dropping back into the condition of a thicket or a virgin forest. Save one bed, in which a few cabbages with veined verdigrised leaves showed their round forms, and where the presence of golden suns with black centres testified to some sort of cultivation of the ground they starred, nature was reasserting its rights over this uncared-for

space, and was destroying the traces of man's work, which it seems to love to destroy.

The greedy branches of the uncut trees spread in every direction. The box, intended to mark the outlines of the borders and the walks, had grown into shrubs, having been untouched by the shears for many a long year. Seeds borne hither by the wind had taken root here and there, and were shooting up, with the vigorous robustness peculiar to weeds, in the places formerly occupied by lovely flowers and rare plants. Thorny-spurred brambles grew athwart the paths and caught the passer-by to prevent his going farther and to conceal from him the mystery of gloom and desolation. Solitude does not like to be surprised in *déshabillé*, and strews all manner of obstacles around herself.

If, however, careless of the scratches of the brambles and the switching of the branches, one persisted in following to the end the ancient walk that had become denser and more obstructed than a trail in the woods, a sort of rocaille niche, in imitation of a rustic grot, was reached. To the plants formerly set in the interstices of the rockery, such as iris, gladiolus, and dark-leaved ivy, others had been added, willow-weeds, hart's-tongue, and wild vines, hanging

beardlike and half-concealing a marble statue of some mythological goddess, Flora or Pomona, which had no doubt been very attractive in its day and must have done honour to its maker, but was now flat-nosed as Death, that feature having been broken off. Instead of flowers the poor goddess carried rotten and venomous-looking mushrooms in her basket, and seemed itself to have been poisoned, its body, of yore so white, being spotted with brown mossy stains. At its feet, under a greenish curtain of water lentils, stagnated, in a stone shell, a brown puddle, left there by the rains; for the lion's mouth, that could be made out still with some trouble, no longer spouted water, as it had ceased to receive any from the conduits that were either stopped up or destroyed.

This grotesque cabinet, as such grottoes were then called, betokened, ruined though it was, a certain amount of comfort now vanished, and the possession of artistic tastes by the former owners of the place. Had the statue been properly cleaned and restored, it would have been found to be in the Florentine style of the Renaissance, in the manner of the Italian sculptors who came to France in the train of Master Rosso, the Primaticcio, which was probably the time when

the now fallen family had reached the height of its splendour.

The grotto was placed against a wall covered with moss saltpetre, on which were still visible remains of trellis-work, intended, no doubt, to mask the wall, when it was built, with a curtain of leafy climbing plants. The wall, scarcely seen through the wild leafage of the trees that had grown unchecked, closed the garden on this side, and beyond stretched the moor, with its dull, low horizon dappled with heath.

Returning towards the mansion, the façade at the back was seen, even more damaged and weather-worn than the one just described, the last owners having endeavoured to preserve appearances at least, and having concentrated their inadequate resources on that side.

In the stables, where twenty horses could have been easily put up, a thin nag, the bones sticking out on its quarters, was extracting from an empty manger a few straws with its yellow, gumless teeth, and from time to time turned toward the door its eye sunk within a socket wherein the Montfaucon rats would not have found a vestige of fat. At the door of the kennel, a single dog, settled in its skin that was too large for it and on which its relaxed muscles showed in flabby lines, was

dozing, resting its muzzle upon the not very well stuffed pillow formed by its paws. It appeared to be so thoroughly accustomed to the loneliness of the place as to have entirely given up watching, and was not disturbed, as is the custom of dogs, even when asleep, by the faintest noise that made itself heard.

The dwelling was entered by a huge stair with a wooden balustrade. There were but two landing-places, for the building was two stories high only, of stone up to the level of the first floor, and of brick and timber above that. On the walls, grisaille paintings, devoured by damp, had apparently been intended to simulate, with the aid of *chiar-oscuro* and perspective, the projections of richly ornamented architecture. There could still be partially made out a row of Hercules ending in thermæ, and supporting a cornice with modules, from which sprang in a graceful curve an arbour of festooned foliage of the vine, through which could be seen a sky with the colour gone out of it, and provided with unknown islands by the leaking in of rain water. Between the Hercules, busts of Roman emperors and other illustrious historical personages pompously exhibited themselves in painted niches; but everything was so faded, so destroyed, so shadowy as to

be the phantom of painting rather than real painting, and that it ought to be described with shadowy words, ordinary vocables being too substantial for the purposes. The echoes of the empty place seemed startled at repeating the sound of footsteps.

A green door, the serge of which had turned yellow, and was only kept in place by a few nails from which the gilding had vanished, led into a room that had possibly been the dining-room in the fabulous times when people ate in that deserted house. A great beam divided the ceiling into two compartments, crossed by apparent rafters, the space between which had formerly been covered with a coat of blue, now concealed by the dust and cobwebs that no maid's brush ever sought to disturb at that height. Above the antique chimney spread the antlers of a stag of ten tines, and along the walls grimaced on darkened canvases smoky portraits representing warriors in armour, their helmets beside them or held by a page, and staring at the beholder with deep black eyes, the only living things in their dead faces; noblemen in velvet gowns, their heads resting on ruffles stiff with starch, like heads of Saint John the Baptist on silver salvers; dowagers in old-fashioned dresses, frightfully livid, and acquiring, in con-

sequence of the decomposition of the pigments, the look of strygæ, lamiæ, and empusæ. The very coarseness of the work, done by country daubers, imparted to the paintings an uncouth and grim aspect. Some had no frames; others had frames the gilt on which had turned dull and rusty. In the corner of every one appeared the arms of the family and the age of the personage represented. Nevertheless, whether the age was advanced or not, there was not much apparent difference between these heads with yellowed lights, darkened shadows, smoky varnish, and powdered with dust. Two or three of these mouldy paintings, covered with a bloom of mildew, had tones like those of decomposing bodies, and proved that the last descendant of these high-born warriors was absolutely indifferent to the fate of the effigies of his noble ancestors.

At night, in the uncertain light of lamps, that mute and immobile gallery must have been transformed into a line of phantoms at once terrifying and absurd. Nothing can be sadder than forgotten portraits in deserted rooms; reproductions, themselves half effaced, of forms long since turned to dust.

Yet, such as they were, these painted phantoms were guests well suited to the desolate solitude of the place;

real inhabitants would have seemed too living in that dead house.

In the centre of the room stood a table of blackened pear-wood, the legs turned in spirals like Salomonic pillars, and pierced with innumerable holes by worms that had been undisturbed in the prosecution of their silent work. The layer of fine gray dust that covered the surface, and on which one could have written with the finger, showed that the table was not often laid.

Two dressers or sideboards of the same material, adorned with a few carvings and which had probably been acquired, as well as the table, in happier days, were placed opposite each other on either side of the room; chipped china glasses that did not match, and two or three small pieces of Palissy ware, representing eels, fishes, crabs, and shells in enamel on a ground of verdure, made a poor showing upon the empty shelves.

Five or six chairs, covered with velvet that might once have been flame-coloured, but that time and wear had turned yellowish-red, allowed the stuffing to escape from the torn places in the cloth, and limped upon uneven legs like crippled mercenaries returning homewards after the battle. It would have been imprudent for any one not a spirit to sit down upon them, and no

doubt the seats were called into use only when the company of ancestors, emerging from their frames, sat themselves down at the empty table during the long winter nights that are so suitable for spectral banquets, and while partaking of an imaginary supper conversed with each other on the decadence of the family.

This hall led into another and smaller one, the walls of which were covered with Flemish tapestries of the kind called "greeneries." But the expression "tapestries" is not intended here to suggest unaccustomed luxury; for in this case they were worn, threadbare, and faded; the stitching of the breadths had given way, and these, gaping in many a place, hung together held only by a few threads and the force of habit. The discoloured trees were yellow on the one side and blue on the other; a heron, standing on one leg in the rushes, was badly moth-eaten; the Flemish farm, with its well covered with hop-vines, was scarcely discernible, and the wan face of the huntsman, in pursuit of wild duck, looked like the waxen visage of a dead body the lips of which have been painted with vermilion and the eyebrows darkened, for the original red and black colouring had remained on those features alone, the dye having apparently been of a faster shade.

Draughts of air blew between the wall and the loose hangings, making the tapestries flap in suspicious fashion. Had Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, been talking in that room, he would have drawn his sword and pinked Polonius behind the arras crying, "A rat!" Innumerable little noises, the imperceptible whispers of solitude, making the silence more painfully felt, troubled the ear and mind of visitors bold enough to push so far. Mice gnawed hungrily a few bits of wool at the bottom of the seamy side of the warp; worms bit at the wood of the beams with a muffled, file-like sound, and the death-watch ticked in the pannelling of the wainscotting. At times, just as if solitude, feeling weary, were stretching its limbs, some piece of furniture cracked unexpectedly, and made the listener start nervously in spite of himself.

In one corner of the room stood a four-poster bedstead, with spindle pillars, hung round with brocatelle curtains, gaping at every fold, the green and white pattern on which had faded into a uniform yellowish shade. No one would have dared to part these curtains for fear of finding a spectral form crouching in the shadow, or, under the white sheet, a stiffened shape with sharp nose, prominent cheekbones, hands folded,

and feet arranged like those of a statue upon a tombstone, — so quickly do the things that have been made for man assume a supernatural air as soon as man has abandoned them. But for the fact that the folds, in their sinister and mysterious stiffness destroyed any idea of love, it might have been thought that some young princess under a spell was sleeping in it as soundly as did the Sleeping Beauty in her enchanted castle.

A table of black wood, inlaid with brass, now loose; a dulled and distorted mirror, the silvering of which had run, as if weary of having no human face to reflect; an arm-chair upholstered in fine embroidery, a work of patience and leisure due to some ancestress, but in which could be made out only a few silver threads amid the faded silk and wool, completed the furniture of the room, which, at a pinch, might have been lived in by a man who feared not ghosts nor spectres.

These two rooms were lighted by the two windows in the façade that had not been walled up. A faint, greenish light filtered in through the ground-glass panes that looked as though silvered outside, and that had not been cleaned for a hundred years. Long curtains, worn

on the folds and that would have torn apart had any one tried to slide them along the rusty iron rods, deepened the already dim twilight and added to the gloom of the place.

On opening the door at the end of this room, one entered into Cimmerian darkness, void, obscurity, and the unknown. Little by little the eye became used to the shadows, through which gleamed a few livid rays of light that filtered through the chinks of the planks with which the windows were boarded up, and then could be made out a suite of rooms every one out of repair, with uneven floors, strewn with broken window-glass, walls either bare or hung with remnants of ragged, unravelled tapestries, ceilings in which the laths showed and through which the rain came, admirably fitted, in a word, for the holding of the Sanhedrim of rats and the States-general of bats. It would have been unsafe to walk in some places, for the flooring rose and sank under the foot, but no one ever ventured within this Thebaid of darkness, dust, and cobwebs. A sickening odour, a smell of mould and solitude, the dank, darksome chill peculiar to sombre places, struck one on the very threshold, just as when one raises the stone covering a cellar and bends over the icy obscurity. And it

was indeed the dead body of the past that was slowly crumbling into dust in those rooms wherein the present never entered, and the years sunk in sleep that were cradled as in hammocks in the gray cobwebs in the corners.

The attics above were the refuge, during the daytime, of feathery-eared, cat-headed, and shining-eyed owls, the roof, broken in a score of places, allowing these amiable birds to come and go freely, feeling as safe and comfortable there as in the ruins of Monthléry or Château Gaillard. Every night the dusty flock issued forth with screams and hootings that would have terrified the superstitious, and set forth to seek afar the food it could not discover in this Tower of Hunger.

The ground-floor rooms were empty save for a few bundles of straw, stalks of maize, and various small gardening implements. In one there was a mattress filled with leaves of Indian corn, with a cover of dark brown stuff, that appeared to be the bed of the single servant in the house.

As my reader is no doubt tired of traversing this solitude, wretchedness, and loneliness, let me take him to the only room in the deserted mansion in which there was any appearance of life, — to the kitchen,

from the chimney of which rose in the heavens that light white vapour mentioned in the description of the exterior of the place.

The yellow flame of a meagre fire licked the back of the fireplace, and occasionally reached the bottom of an iron pipkin hanging on the crane, while its feeble light touched with a red spark in the shadows the edges of one or two stewpans on the wall. The daylight, streaming down the great flue that rose to the roof without a bend, fell softly in bluish tints upon the ashes, making the fire look paler yet, so that the very flame seemed to be frozen on that cold hearth. Had it not been for the cover, the rain would have fallen into the pot and the broth would have been diluted by the storm. The water, slowly heated, had at last begun to boil, and the pipkin wheezed in the silence like an asthmatic patient. A few cabbage-leaves, thrown up by the boiling, indicated that the cultivated part of the garden had been laid under contribution for the making of this more than Spartan broth.

An old thin, black cat, its fur resembling that of a worn-out muff, and showing in the bare places the bluish skin beneath, was seated on its tail as near the fire as it dared without singeing its whiskers, and stared

at the pipkin with its green eyes, the pupils in the form of an I, with an air of interested supervision. Its ears had been cut close to the head, and its tail close to the rump, making it look like one of those Japanese monsters that are placed in cabinets among other curiosities, or else like one of those fantastic animals that witches, bound for the sabbath, intrust with the care of skimming the pot in which they are brewing their philters. That cat, quite alone in the kitchen, seemed to be making soup for its own personal use, and no doubt it had also set out upon the oaken table the plate adorned with red and green bouquets, the pewter goblet, polished, probably, with its claws, so marked with streaks was it, and the earthenware jug, on the paunch of which were to be seen, coarsely done in blue, the same arms that figured on the entrance porch, the keystone, and the portraits.

For whom was intended this modest repast served in this deserted manor? Possibly for the familiar spirit of the house, the *genius loci*, the kobold faithful to the home it had adopted; and the black cat with the deeply mysterious eyes was awaiting its coming in order to wait upon it, a serviette under its arm.

The pipkin boiled on, and the cat remained motion-

less at its post, like a sentinel whose relief has been forgotten. At last a step sounded outside, heavy and slow, like that of an aged person. A slight cough made itself heard, the latch creaked, and an old man, half peasant, half servant, entered the kitchen.

On seeing the new-comer, the cat, apparently an old friend, left the ashes on the hearth and rubbed itself in friendly fashion against his legs, rounding its back, putting out and drawing in its claws, and producing in its throat that purring sound which is the highest sign of satisfaction used by the feline race.

"All right, all right, Beelzebub," said the old man bending down and passing his horny hand upon the cat's back two or three times, as if he wished not to be outdone in politeness by the animal; "all right! I know that you are fond of me, and we are lonely enough here, my poor master and I, not to be heedless of the caresses of an animal that has no soul, but that seems to understand us all the same."

This exchange of civilities over, the cat proceeded to walk in front of the man, guiding him towards the chimney, as if for the purpose of indicating the location of the pipkin, upon which it gazed with a most pathetic look of hungry desire; for Beelzebub was growing old,

its hearing was less sharp, its sight less keen, and its paw less agile than of yore; consequently its success in stalking birds and mice had become markedly less frequent. Thus it was that it kept its eyes upon the broth of which it hoped to have a share, a hope that made it lick its chops in anticipation.

Peter, such was the old servant's name, took a handful of brushwood and cast it upon the half-dead fire; the branches crackled and twisted, and soon the flame flashed bright and clear from amidst a cloud of smoke, sending out a delightful volley of sparks. It was just as if salamanders had been enjoying themselves and dancing sarabands in the flames. A poor consumptive cricket, carried away by the warmth and the brightness, even tried to accompany it with its chirp, but failed to produce anything more than a hoarse sound.

Under the great mantel of the chimney, with its old vandyked lambrequin of green serge, turned yellow by the smoke, Peter sat down upon a wooden stool, with Beelzebub by his side. The fire lighted up his face, tanned to a darker colour than that of a native of the Caribbees by age, sunshine, the open air, and the inclemencies of the weather. A few locks of white hair, escaping from under his blue cap and plastered on his

temples, brought out still more strongly the red brick colour of his dark complexion, while his black eyebrows contrasted with his snowy locks. He had the long Basque face and hooked nose, like the beak of a bird of prey. Long perpendicular wrinkles, resembling sabre-cuts, furrowed his face from top to bottom.

A sort of livery coat with faded braiding, and of a colour that a professional painter would have been puzzled to define, half covered his chamois-leather jacket, polished and blackened in places by the rubbing of the cuirass, the result being that the yellow tone of the leather had acquired greenish tints like those that show on the breast of a very gamy partridge; for Peter had been a soldier, and his civilian dress was eked out in parts by a few remnants of his military harness. His not very full breeches showed the warp and woof of the stuff as plainly as if it had been embroidery canvas, and it was quite impossible to determine whether they had originally been of cloth, petersham, or serge; the nap had long since disappeared from these shining trews, and never was eunuch's chin smoother than they. The weaker places were darned by a hand evidently more accustomed to handle a sword than a needle, and these plainly visible mendings testified to the care taken by

the owner of the garment to make it last as long as possible. Like unto Nestor, these aged breeches had seen three generations of men. There were serious grounds for believing that they had once been red, but this important point is not absolutely established.

The cord soles, fastened by blue lacings to the legs of woollen stockings, which served Peter in the stead of shoes, recalled Spanish alpargatas. No doubt this coarse form of cothurn had been selected as more economical than the bow-adorned shoe or the flapped boot; for rigorous, deliberate, and cleanly poverty was manifest in the smallest details of the old man's attire, and even in his attitude, that betrayed dejected resignation. Leaning against the inner wall of the chimney-place, he clasped his knee with his big hands, reddened by purple tones like those of vine leaves at the end of autumn, and formed a motionless pendant to the cat, Beelzebub, that, curled up in the ashes in front of him, watched with hungry and pitiful look, full of deepest attention, the asthmatic boiling of the pot.

"Young master is very late returning to-day," murmured Peter, as he noted through the yellowed and smoky panes of the single kitchen-window the last luminous glow of sunset fade and die away in the sky

laden with heavy rain clouds. "What enjoyment can he find in walking about the moors all alone? It is true that this place is so melancholy that it would be difficult to feel more weary anywhere else."

A joyous and hoarse bark was now heard; the horse in its stable stamped and rattled upon the edge of its manger the chain by which it was fastened; the black cat broke off making a bit of toilet by passing its wet paw upon its chops and behind its cropped ears, and walked towards the door like an affectionate and well-bred animal that knows its duty and performs it.

The door opened; Peter rose, respectfully removed his cap, and the new-comer entered the room preceded by the old dog of which I have spoken, and which tried to leap up on him and fell back heavily, handicapped by age. Beelzebub did not exhibit towards Miraut the antipathy its fellows generally entertain for the canine race; on the contrary it looked at the dog in most friendly fashion, arching its back and rolling its green eyes. It was plain that they were old friends and often kept each other company in the solitary mansion.

Baron de Sigognac, for it was the lord of the ruinous castle who had just entered the kitchen, was a young

fellow twenty-five or twenty-six years of age, though at first sight he would have been thought older, so grave and serious did he appear. The feeling of powerlessness, the consequence of poverty, had driven the brightness from his features and dispelled the springtime bloom that mantles youthful faces. His sunken eyes were already circled with dark rings, and his hollow cheeks brought out all the more strongly his prominent cheekbones. His mustaches, instead of being gallantly curled up, drooped low and seemed to weep on either side of his sad mouth. His hair, carelessly dressed, fell in black locks adown his pale face with a lack of coquetry rare in a young man who might well have passed for handsome, and testified to an absolute hopelessness of being attractive. A habitual secret sorrow had imprinted marks of grief upon a face that a little happiness would have made charming, and the resolution natural at his age seemed to have yielded to an ill-fortune against which he had uselessly struggled.

Although active and of robust rather than weak constitution, the young Baron moved with apathetic slowness, like a man who has given up hopes of life. His gestures were sleepy and dead, his countenance inert,

and it was plain that it was quite indifferent to him to be there or elsewhere, at home or away.

On his head he wore an old gray felt hat, broken and misshapen, and a great deal too large for him, that fell down upon his eyes and compelled him, when he wished to look at anything, to throw his head back. A feather, the scanty web of which made it look like the backbone of a fish, was fastened in the hat, evidently with the intention of playing the part of a plume, but it hung limp behind as if ashamed of itself. A collar of old-fashioned lace, the open parts of which were not the result of the lace-maker's skill, and the number of which had been increased by age, fell upon a doublet the loose folds of which betokened that it had been cut for a taller and stouter man than the slightly built Baron. The sleeves of his jerkin concealed his hands after the fashion of the sleeves of a monk's frock, and his wide-topped boots, adorned with iron spurs, came up to his waist. This uncouth equipment had been that of his late father, who had died a few years before, and Sigognac was wearing out the paternal garments, ready though they had been to be handed over to the dealer in second-hand clothes at the time of their former owner's death. Thus accoutred in a dress that

might have been quite in the fashion at the beginning of the late reign, the young Baron looked both ridiculous and pathetic, and might have been mistaken for his own grandfather. Although he professed the most filial veneration for his father's memory, and though tears often came into his eyes as he put on the dear relics, that seemed to preserve in their folds the gestures and the attitudes of the deceased nobleman, it was not quite from preference that young Sigognac arrayed himself in the paternal duds. The truth was he owned no other clothes, and had been uncommonly glad to discover this portion of his inheritance at the bottom of an old trunk. His youth's garments had become too small and too tight, and in his father's he was at his ease at least. Then the peasantry, accustomed to respect them when worn by the old Baron, did not consider them ridiculous when worn by the son, and saluted them just as deferentially. They noticed the tears in the doublet as little as the cracks in the castle walls. Poor though Sigognac was, he was still their lord, and the decadence of the family did not strike them as it did strangers, though it was really a rather grotesque and melancholy sight to see the young Baron go by in his old clothes, riding his old horse and

accompanied by his old dog, like the knight in Albrecht Dürer's engraving of "The Knight, Death, and the Devil."

Sigognac silently sat down at the little table, after having acknowledged with a kindly gesture of the hand Peter's respectful greeting.

The latter took the pipkin from the crane, poured its contents into a plate of ordinary earthenware, in which there lay already a slice of bread, and placed the whole before the Baron. It was the common sort of soup made of rye bread, cabbage, and bacon, still eaten in Gascony under the name of "garbure." He next drew from the cupboard a block of "miassou" quivering upon a serviette dusted with maize flour, and brought it to the table upon the board on which it was placed. This local dish, together with the "garbure," enriched with a bit of bacon, borrowed no doubt, to judge from its small size, from the bait of a mouse-trap, constituted the Baron's frugal meal. He ate with an absent-minded air between Beelzebub and Miraut, both gazing ecstatically upon him with heads up, one on each side of his chair, waiting for some crumb of the feast to fall to them. From time to time the Baron threw to Miraut, who did not allow the morsel to reach the

floor, a piece of bread that he had pointed at the bacon, in order to give it at least the smell of meat, while the skin became the cat's share, Beelzebub evincing its satisfaction by growling low and stretching out one paw, with every claw bare as if prepared to defend its prey.

The meagre repast ended, the Baron seemed to sink into painful reflections or at least into a train of thought that had nothing very pleasant about it. Miraut rested his head on his master's knee and fixed upon him eyes that age was dimming with a bluish film, but which a spark of almost human intelligence strove to pierce. He appeared to understand the Baron's thoughts and to try to manifest his sympathy for him. Beelzebub was purring loudly and uttering little plaintive cries in its efforts to attract the Baron's attention to itself. Peter remained standing a little way off, motionless as one of the tall granite statues that are to be seen in cathedral porches, respecting his master's reverie and waiting to receive his orders.

Meanwhile night had fallen, and deep shadows were growing in the corners of the kitchen like swarms of bats that cling with the claws of their membraneous wings to the angles of the walls. The flickering fire, revived by the gusts blowing down the chimney,

coloured with quaint reflections the group collected round the table in a sort of sad intimacy brought out more strongly still by the melancholy solitude of the mansion. Of a once rich and powerful family none now remained save this lonely youth, wandering like a shadow through the home inhabited by his ancestors; of the numerous retinue there was left only one domestic, serving through devotion and who could have no successor; of the pack of thirty hunting-dogs survived but a single hound, almost blind and gray with age, while a black cat represented the soul of the home.

The Baron signed to Peter that he would withdraw, and Peter, bending down upon the hearth, lighted a splinter of pine wood, smeared with resin, a sort of cheap candle much used by the poorer peasantry, and started in front of his young lord, Miraut and Beelzebub joining the procession. The smoky light of the torch made the faded frescoes upon the walls of the staircase sway to and fro, and imparted a semblance of life to the darkened portraits in the dining-room, their black, staring eyes appearing to cast a look of sorrowful pity upon their descendant.

On reaching the fantastic bedroom I have described, the old servant lighted a small single copper lamp, the

wick of which was curled up in the oil like a tape-worm in a bottle of spirits in an apothecary's window, and then withdrew, followed by Miraut. Beelzebub, who enjoyed the privilege of admission at all times, settled down in one of the arm-chairs; the Baron sank down upon another, overcome by solitude, lack of occupation, and weariness.

Ghostly as the room looked in the daytime, it was infinitely worse at night in the uncertain light of the lamp; the tapestries turned livid in tone, and the huntsman, on the background of sombre verdure, became, thus lighted up, almost a real being. With his arquebuse at the ready, he looked like a murderer lying in wait for his victim, while his red lips contrasted still more forcibly with the pallor of his face. They had the appearance of a vampire's ensanguined mouth.

The lamp, owing to the damp, sputtered and cast an intermittent light; the wind moaned in the passages, and strange and terrifying sounds made themselves heard in the deserted rooms. The weather had turned bad, and great drops of rain, driven by the gusts, lashed the panes that trembled in their leaden settings. At times the sash seemed to bend inwards and to be about to blow open, as though some one were pressing against

it outside. It was the knee of the storm pushing against the frail obstacle. At other times, as if to add a new note to the harmony, one of the owls roosting under the roof uttered a wail like the cry of a child being murdered, or, bothered by the light, dashed heavily against the window panes.

The lord of this dismal dwelling, accustomed to these lugubrious symphonies, paid no attention to them. Beelzebub alone, with the restlessness natural to its species, moved the roots of its cropped ears at every sound and gazed fixedly into the dark corners as if it perceived with its night-seeing eyes something invisible to the human glance. This, with its diabolical name and mien, would have terrified a man less brave than the Baron, for it looked as though it had learned many things in the course of its nocturnal rambles through the uninhabited rooms and garrets of the castle, and more than once at the end of a passage it must have come across things that would have turned a man's hair white with fear.

Sigognac took from a table a small volume, the faded binding of which bore his family escutcheon stamped upon it, and began to turn the leaves with a careless hand. While his eyes carefully followed the lines, his

mind was elsewhere, or at least was not greatly fixed upon Ronsard's amorous sonnets and odes, notwithstanding their lovely rimes and their learned inventions renewed from the Greeks. He soon threw down the book and slowly began undoing his doublet, like a man who does not feel sleepy and who is going to bed simply because he does not know what to do with himself and is going to try to drown weariness in sleep. Mournfully indeed do the grains of sand drop in the hour-glass on a dark and rainy night in a ruined castle amid an ocean of heath with not a single living being for thirty miles around.

And in truth the young Baron, sole survivor of the Sigognac family, had abundant reasons to be melancholy. His ancestors had ruined themselves in various ways, either by gaming, by making war, or by the foolish desire to shine, so that each generation had handed down to its successor a patrimony that decreased steadily.

The fiefs, the farms, and the lands pertaining to the domain had vanished one after another, and the last Sigognac, after making incredible efforts to restore the fortunes of the family — efforts that were necessarily vain, for it is too late to stop the leaks when the vessel

is sinking — had left to his son only the ruinous castle and the few acres of sterile land that surrounded it; all the rest had had to be given up to Jews and creditors.

Thus it was that poverty had cradled the child in its thin arms and given his lips suck from dried-up breasts. When still quite young, he had lost his mother, who had died of melancholy in the ruinous castle, thinking of the misery that was later to weigh down upon her son and to close every career to him. He had never known the sweet caresses and the tender attentions that are the lot of childhood even in the least fortunate homes. His father's affection, which he nevertheless regretted, had generally manifested itself in the shape of kicks or orders to have him whipped. At this very moment he was so utterly dull that he would have welcomed one of those fatherly admonitions, the remembrance of which brought tears to his eyes; for a kick from one's father is after all a mark of human relationship, and during the four years since the Baron had been laid in the Sigognac family vault, the young fellow had lived in the deepest solitude. His youthful pride revolted at the thought of mingling with the provincial nobility and in hunting-parties so long as he lacked the train that became his rank.

And indeed what would people have said on seeing Baron de Sigognac dressed like an Hostière tramp or an apple-picker of Perche? It was this reflection that had kept him from offering his services as retainer to some prince or other. The consequence was that many believed the Sigognacs extinct, and forgetfulness, which grows over the dead even more rapidly than does the grass, was effacing the once rich and influential family, and very few persons were aware that there still remained a representative of the impoverished race.

For some time past Beelzebub had seemed uneasy, looking up as though scenting trouble, standing up to the window and leaning its paws upon the panes, trying to pierce the black obscurity of night and wrinkling and working its nose. Soon Miraut's prolonged howl rising in the silence confirmed the cat's pantomime. Plainly something uncommon was occurring in the vicinity of the usually quiet mansion. Miraut kept on barking with all the energy left him by his chronic state of hoarseness. The Baron, making ready for any eventuality, buttoned up his doublet, which he had begun to take off, and rose to his feet.

"What is the matter with Miraut, that he is making such a noise? Generally he snores like the Seven

Sleepers' dog upon the straw in his kennel as soon as the sun has set. Can there be a wolf prowling round the walls?" said the young man to himself as he buckled on a sword with heavy iron shell hilt that he took down from the wall, and pulled the belt to the last hole, for the leather strap cut for the old Baron would have gone twice round the younger man's waist.

Three blows struck rather loudly on the castle gate sounded at regular intervals, and awoke the mournful echoes in the deserted rooms. Who could be coming at such an hour to disturb the solitude of the manor house and the silence of night? Who could be the ill-advised traveller knocking at a door that had not opened to a guest for so long, — not that the owner lacked for courtesy, but simply that no visitors had ever come that way? Who could possibly be seeking for admission to this inn of wretchedness, to this high court of fasting, to this hostel of poverty and famine?

II

THE CAR OF THESPIS

SIGOGNAC descended the stairs, shielding his lamp with his hand from the draughts of air that threatened to extinguish it. The light shone through his thin fingers and dyed them a diaphanous red, so that, although it was night and he was followed by a black cat instead of walking before the sun, he deserved the epithet applied by old Homer to Aurora's fingers.

He removed the bar of the door, opened the leaf, and found himself confronted by an individual in whose face he flashed his lamp. Thus illumined a rather grotesque countenance became visible against the background of darkness. A skull, the colour of rancid butter, shone in the light and the rain; gray hair plastered on the temples, a nose as red as the autumn vintage, adorned with grog-blossoms and swelling out like a bulb between two wall eyes, surmounted by very thick and curiously black brows, hanging cheeks marked

with vinous tones and striated with red lines, a thick-lipped mouth like a drunkard's and a satyr's, a warty chin on which grew a few hairs as hard and rough as the bristles of a clothes-brush, combined to make up a face fit to figure as a mask under the cornice of the Pont-Neuf. A dash of kindliness and cleverness tempered the somewhat unengaging aspect of the features, and, besides, the wrinkles round the eyes and the corners of the lips drawn up towards the ears betokened an intention to smile pleasantly. This queer face, showing above a ruff of questionable cleanliness, topped a body hung with a black smock-frock, that kept bowing up and down with affected exaggeration of politeness.

Having performed his salutations, the burlesque personage, forestalling the question about to be uttered by the Baron's lips, spoke in a slightly emphatic and declamatory tone: —

"Deign to forgive me, noble sir, if I knock in person at the postern of your fortress without having first sent on a page or a dwarf to sound the horn, and that at so late an hour. Necessity knows no law, and compels the most polite among the well-bred to indulge in laches of conduct."

"What do you want?" broke in the Baron rather sharply, annoyed by the old rascal's verbiage.

"Hospitality for my comrades and myself, princes and princesses, Leanders and Isabellas, doctors and swashbucklers, who go from town to town on the car Thespis; the aforesaid car, drawn after the manner of the ancients by oxen, being at this moment stuck in a mud-hole not far from your residence."

"So far as I can understand you, you are travelling play-actors and you have lost your way?"

"No one could better interpret my words," replied the actor, "and all you say is gospel truth. May I hope that your lordship will grant my request?"

"Although my home is in very bad repair and I have nothing much to offer you, you will nevertheless be somewhat better off within than outside in the driving rain."

The Pedant, for such seemed to be the part taken by him in the company, bowed by way of assent.

During the course of the conversation, Peter, awakened by Miraut's barking, had risen and joined his master under the porch. Informed of what had happened, he lit a lantern and the three men proceeded in the direction of the mud-stuck cart.

The Leander and the Swashbuckler were heaving on the wheels, and the Tyrant was pricking the oxen with his tragedy dagger. The women, wrapped up in their cloaks, were bewailing their fate, wailing and shrieking. The unexpected reinforcement, and especially Peter's experience in such matters, soon enabled the heavy chariot to get out of the bad spot, and once drawn on firmer ground it ere long reached the mansion, rolled in under the porch, and was drawn up in the court-yard.

The oxen were unyoked and put into the stable by the side of the white nag; the actresses jumped down from the car and shook out their crushed dresses; then, preceded by Sigognac, they ascended to the dining-room, which was the most habitable part of the dwelling. Peter managed to discover in the wood-shed a faggot and a few handfuls of brushwood, which he cast upon the hearth and which blazed up merrily. Although it was but the beginning of autumn, a fire was needed to dry the wet clothing of the ladies; besides, the night was cool, and the wind whistled in through the cracks of the wainscotting in the uninhabited room.

Although their wandering life had accustomed the players to accommodations of the most varied descrip-

tion, they gazed with surprise upon this strange lodging, apparently long since given over to ghosts by men, and that awakened involuntarily thoughts of tragic stories; but, like well-bred people, they exhibited neither terror nor surprise.

"I cannot give you more than plates and cutlery," said the young Baron. "My pantry does not hold enough to afford supper to a mouse. I live alone in this place; I never have any guests, and you can see for yourselves, without being told, that this is not the abode of wealth."

"That does not matter," replied the Pedant; "for if on the stage we have to put up with chickens made of boards, and bottles turned in the solid wood, we are careful to provide more substantial viands for daily life. Hollow meats and imaginary wine would ill suit our stomachs, and in virtue of being the commissary of the company, I always have in reserve a Bayonne ham, a venison pasty, a loin of water-meadow veal, and a dozen bottles of Cahors or Bordeaux wine."

"Well spoken, Pedant," exclaimed the Leander. "Go and fetch the provender, and if his lordship will allow us and also deigns to sup with us, let us set the banquet-table right in this room. There is plenty of

crockery in these sideboards, and the ladies can lay the covers."

The Baron, quite taken aback by the adventure, nodded in assent, whereupon the Isabella and the Donna Serafina, who were both seated by the fireplace, rose and set out the plates and dishes on the table, which Peter had already dusted and on which he had spread a well-worn but clean cloth.

The Pedant soon reappeared, carrying a basket in either hand, and triumphantly placed in the centre of the table a pasty fortress, with fair golden walls, the interior of which contained a garrison of beccaficos and partridges. He surrounded this gastronomical fort with six bottles, by way of outworks that would have to be carried before the place could be taken. A smoked ox-tongue and a piece of ham made everything symmetrical.

Beelzebub, having perched upon the top of one of the sideboards, was following the extraordinary preparations with interest and was endeavouring to appropriate, by smelling them at least, the many exquisite things outspread in such abundance. Its truffle-coloured nose breathed in deeply the perfumed emanations, its green eyes sparkled and rejoiced, and its chin

was wet with the silvery saliva of desire. It would have dearly loved to draw near the table and to take a share of the Gargantua-like cheer, but that, apart from the hermit sobriety of the household, it was frightened by the sight of so many strange faces, so that its poltroonery struggled against its gormandism.

The Swashbuckler, deeming the light of the lamp insufficient, had fetched from the chariot two stage candlesticks of wood covered with gilt paper and each provided with a number of candles, an addition that produced quite a splendid illumination. These candlesticks, in shape not unlike the seven-branched candlestick of Scripture, were usually placed upon the hymeneal altar, in the last scene of plays with scenery, or on the banquet-table, in Mairet's "Mariamne" or Tristan's "Herodias."

Thanks to the blaze of these candles and of the burning brushwood, the dead room had regained an appearance of life. The pallid faces of the portraits were slightly flushed, and if perchance the virtuous dowagers, in their stiff collarettes and hoop-skirts, looked rather prim at the sight of the youthful actresses frolicking in the stern manor-house, the warriors and Knights of Malta, on the other hand, appeared to smile

upon them from out their frames and to enjoy being present at the entertainment, save, however, two or three old graybeards who obstinately sulked under their yellow varnish, and preserved, in spite of all, the gruff expression given them by the painter.

A warmer and brighter atmosphere filled the great hall, in which one usually breathed but the mouldy dampness of the grave. The dilapidated state of the tapestries and furniture became less patent and the pale spectre of poverty seemed to have left the castle for a brief season.

Sigognac, whom the surprise had pained at first, now allowed himself to be carried away by a novel sensation of comfort. His imagination was pleasantly stirred by the Isabella, Donna Serafina, and even by the maid, these women appearing to him more in the light of deities come down to earth than of mere mortals. As a matter of fact, they were three very pretty women, who would have made the pulses of far less innocent fellows than the young Baron beat fast. The whole thing seemed to him to be a dream, and he dreaded awaking from it.

He gave his hand to Donna Serafina, whom he seated on his right. Isabella sat down on his left, and the

maid opposite; the duenna sat by the Pedant, while Leander and the Swashbuckler sat where they pleased. The young lord of the place was then enabled to study the faces of his guests at his leisure, for they were brilliantly lighted and stood out strongly. He first examined the ladies, of whom it may not be out of place to give a slight sketch while the Pedant is making a breach in the ramparts of the pasty.

The Serafina was a young woman some twenty-four to twenty-five years of age, who, thanks to her having to play the parts of leading coquettes, had acquired the air of a woman of the world and the ways of a high-born lady. Her face, of a slightly marked oval, her somewhat aquiline nose, her prominent gray eyes, her red lips, the lower one divided by a line like Anne of Austria's, and looking like a cherry, combined to form an engaging and aristocratic mien further improved by the two masses of nut-brown hair that flowed in waves on either side her cheeks, which the excitement and the warmth flushed with rosy tints. Two long locks, called "mustaches," each bound with three bows of black ribbon, had capriciously separated from the crimped curls and brought out their vaporous grace in the same way as strong touches put

on a painting at the last moment by an artist. Her felt hat, with its round brim and its feathers, one of which curled like a plume upon her shoulders, while the others were cockled up in puffs, formed a cavalier head-dress. A man's collar, trimmed with Alençon lace and fastened with a black bow, like the mustaches, spread out upon a green velvet dress with slashed sleeves, trimmed with aiguillettes and frogs, while the open front allowed the linen to puff out. A white silk scarf, worn saltire-wise, gave a gallant and dashing look to the costume.

In this dress Serafina had the mien of a Penthesilea or a Marphisa, thoroughly suited to adventures and comedies of cloak and sword. It is true that the garments were not absolutely new, that wear had caused the velvet of the dress to become shiny in places, that the Frisian linen was somewhat rumpled, and that the lace would have looked rather yellow by daylight. On closer inspection the embroidery on the scarf was seen to be a bit rusty and told of pinchbeck; several of the aiguillettes had parted with their tips; the worn braiding of the frogs was full of loose ends in places; the drooping feathers flapped rather limply upon the brim of the felt hat; the lady's hair was somewhat out of

curl, and a few bits of straw, picked up in the van, mingled their poverty with its opulence. But these minor blemishes did not prevent Donna Serafina from having the port of a queen deprived of her kingdom. If her dress was faded, her complexion was blooming, and for the matter of that, her attire struck the young Baron de Sigognac, quite unaccustomed to such splendour, as the most dazzling thing in the world, for he had hitherto seen only peasant women dressed in coarse stuff skirts and capes of calamanco, and, besides, he was too much taken with the beauty herself to pay any attention to the defects in her dress.

The Isabella was younger than the Donna Serafina, as became her part — she played the *ingénues*. Nor did she carry so far the bravery of dress, limiting herself to an elegant and *bourgeoise* simplicity, as became the daughter of Cassandre. She had delicate, almost childish features, lovely silky brown hair, long lashes veiling her eyes, a small mouth the shape of Cupid's bow, and an air of maidenly modesty that was more natural than affected. A bodice of gray taffeta, trimmed with black velvet and jet, came down in a point over a skirt of the same colour ; a slightly starched ruff rose behind her pretty neck, on which played some

little stray curls, and round her neck she wore a string of imitation pearls. While at the first glance she attracted less attention than the Serafina, she retained it longer; she did not dazzle, but she charmed, which has an advantage of its own.

The Spanish expression, *morena*, applied to brunettes, could perfectly be applied to the soubrette, for her complexion was the golden tawny complexion of the gitana. Her thick, curly hair was raven black, and her yellowish brown eyes sparkled with diabolical mischievousness. Her wide, bright red lips parted now and then to show the gleam of white teeth that would have done honour to a wolf cub. For the rest, she was thin and burned up, as it were, with ardour and wit, but hers was that youthful, healthy thinness one likes to see. She must certainly have been as expert at receiving and passing on a love-letter off the boards as she was on them, but the woman who ventured to make use of this Dariolette had to be uncommonly sure of her own attractions. More than one love-epistle handed to her failed to be delivered, and the forgetful gallant dallied in the antechamber. She was one of those women whom their own sex consider ugly, but whom men cannot resist; they seem to be compounded of salt, pimento,

and cantharides, which does not prevent their being cold as usurers when their interests are in question. Her dress consisted of a fanciful blue and yellow costume, with a cap of imitation lace.

Dame Leonard, the heavy mother of the company, was dressed wholly in black, like a Spanish duenna. Her face, with its manifold chins, was framed in by a taminy coif; her complexion was wan, and worn by forty years' use of paint, while her unhealthy stoutness, due to age rather than good health, had given it the tone of yellow ivory and old wax. Her eyes, over which fell flabby lids, had an expression of low cunning, and formed a couple of black spots in her bloodless face. In spite of her carefully removing them with tweezers, a few hairs were beginning to shade the corners of her mouth. Feminine characteristics had almost disappeared from her face, the wrinkles of which could have told many a tale, had any one been curious enough to inquire. An actress since her childhood, Dame Leonard knew all about her profession, in which she had played every part in succession, up to and including that of duenna, always regretfully accepted by the coquetry of woman, who will not believe in the ravages of time. Dame

Leonard had talent, and old though she was knew how to gain applause, even when side by side with young and pretty women, who were quite amazed to find it bestowed upon that old witch.

So much for the feminine part of the company. The chief comic parts were represented in it, and if a character was wanting some wandering actor or stage-struck amateur was taken in for the nonce, quite delighted to take a minor part and to have thus the opportunity of getting closer to the Isabellas and the Angelicas.

The male part was composed of the Pedant, already described, and of whom it is unnecessary to speak further, the Leander, the Scappino, the tragedy Tyrant, and the Swashbuckler or Hector.

The Leander, or first lover, whose business it was to make the most Hyrcanian tigresses more gentle than lambs, to fool the Truffaldini, to push aside the Ergastes and to pass triumphantly and superbly through the play, was a fellow of some thirty years who looked younger, thanks to the excessive care he took of his appearance. It is no small matter to represent, before female spectators, the lover, the mysterious and perfect being which each one of them fashions according to her

own sweet will after the pattern of the "Amadis" or "Astrea." Therefore Master Leander nightly rubbed his face with spermaceti and powdered it with talc; his eyebrows, the rebellious hairs in which he pulled out with tweezers, looked like a line drawn with Indian ink, and ended in fine points. His teeth, brushed to excess and rubbed with electuary, shone like Eastern pearls in his red gums, which he exhibited on every possible occasion, forgetful of the Greek proverb that says nothing is so foolish as a foolish laugh. His comrades affirmed that even when off the boards he rouged a little in order to make his eyes brighter. His carefully curled hair hung down his cheeks in shining spirals somewhat straightened out by the rain; a fact he took advantage of to curl them again with his fingers, thus being enabled to show off a very white hand, on which sparkled a solitaire stone much too large to be genuine. His turn-down collar showed a round, white neck so closely shaven that no vestige of beard was visible. A quantity of fairly clean linen puffed out between the bottom of his jacket and his breeches, quilled with a wealth of ribbons, the care of which appeared to preoccupy him greatly. Even when looking at the wall, he seemed to be dying of love, and he could not call for wine without appar-

ently fainting away. He punctuated his sentences with sighs, and, even when speaking on most indifferent matters, indulged in languishing looks, sentimental airs, and graces fit to kill one with laughing, but the ladies thought it all charming.

The Scappino had a foxy, cunning, satirical face; his eyebrows were of the shape of circumflex accents, his eyes restless and wide-awake, their yellow pupils quivering like a gold piece upon quicksilver; crow's-feet of sly wrinkles showed at each corner of his eyelids, full of lies, trickery, and deceit. His thin, flexible lips were constantly in motion, and smiling equivocally exhibited sharp teeth of rather ferocious aspect. When he took off his beretta, striped white and red, his closely cropped hair revealed the contours of a head with curious bumps. His hair was tawny and matted like a lion's and completed the air of noxious animal that marked his countenance. One felt tempted to look at the rascal's hand to see whether it was not blistered by the handling of the sweeps; for he looked quite as if he had spent some fifteen years of his life on the ocean engaged in writing his memoirs with a fifteen-foot pen. His falsetto voice, now high, now low, sounded with sudden changes of tone and queer squeaks, that startled and compelled

laughter even if one did not feel like it. His motions were unexpected and apparently due to the sudden release of a concealed spring; there was something illogical and troublous about them, and they seemed to serve the purpose of holding the attention of the person addressed, rather than of expressing a thought or a sentiment. They were like the pantomime of a fox rapidly twisting and turning and indulging in innumerable tricks under a tree from the top of which a fascinated turkey is watching it before letting itself fall.

He wore a gray smock-frock over his striped costume, either because he had not had time to change after the last performance, or because his scanty wardrobe did not include both a complete mufti and stage dress.

As for the Tyrant, he was a very kind-hearted fellow whom nature, no doubt jocularly inclined, had endowed with every external sign of ferocity. Never did a gentler soul dwell within a grimmer frame; heavy dark eyebrows, two fingers in width and as black as if of moleskin, meeting over the nose, closely curling hair, thick beard up to the eyes, and kept uncut in order to avoid the trouble of wearing a false one when he played the

part of Herod or Polyphontes, and a complexion the colour of Cordova leather, composed for him a mien as truculent and formidable as that painters love to bestow upon executioners and their assistants in the representations of the flaying alive of Saint Bartholomew and the beheading of Saint John the Baptist. A voice of thunder that made the panes rattle and the glasses dance on the table considerably helped to maintain the awe inspired by his ogre-like appearance, which was further set off by a black velvet doublet of most antique cut, so that he always won a success due to terror when he bellowed the lines of Garnier or Scudéry. For the rest, he had a noble corporation and most satisfactorily filled the throne.

As for the Hector, he was thin, pale, black, and dried up like a man hanged in summer; his skin looked like parchment clinging to bones; he had a huge nose, the shape of a bird-of-prey's beak, the thin edge of which shone like horn, and which rose up between the two halves of his shuttle-shaped face, made longer still by a pointed beard. His two profiles, stuck one against the other, found it very difficult to form a face between them, and his eyes had to turn up in Chinese fashion in order to find room in it. His half-shaven eyebrows

curled up like black commas above his restless eyes; his mustaches, of amazing length, were waxed and pointed at each end by means of a cosmetic, and rose in a semicircle towards the heavens they sought to pierce; his ears, standing out from his head, were not at all unlike the two handles of a jug, and offered themselves to slaps and pinches. All these extravagant features, pertaining to caricature rather than to nature, seemed to have been carved by some mad fancy on the neck of a rebec, or to have been copied from some of the Pantagruelic monsters and chimeras that show at night on pastrycooks' lanterns. His hectoring grimaces had at last become his customary expression, and even when he left the theatre, he walked with long strides, his head thrown back, his fist on his hip, and one hand on the guard of his sword. The accoutrement of the fellow consisted of a yellow jerkin, bulging out like a cuirass, trimmed with green and slashed in Spanish fashion along the ribs, a starched ruff, supported by wire and cardboard, as vast as the Round Table, and on which the twelve Peers might have eaten their dinner, puffed trunk-hose fastened with points, white Russia-leather boots, in which his skinny legs waggled like flutes in their case when the piper takes them away,

and a gigantic rapier which he never parted with, the open-work iron shell hilt of which must have weighed full fifty pounds. Over this costume he threw, for additional bravery, a blanket, the bottom of which was lifted by his rapier. Let me add, that I may omit nothing, that his gray felt hat, pulled out into the shape of a filter cone, was grotesquely adorned with a couple of cock's-feathers.

The meal was a silent one at first, for great appetites, like great loves, are wordless, but the pangs of hunger once appeased, every tongue was loosed. The young Baron, who probably had never had a full meal since the day he was weaned, ate, or gobbled up the food rather, with an ardour that would have prevented any one supposing that he had already supped, and this in spite of his earnest wish to appear love-lorn and romantic to the Serafina and the Isabella. The Pedant, who was amused by this juvenile appetite, piled up on Sigognac's plate partridge-wings and slices of ham that forthwith vanished like snowflakes falling upon a red-hot shovel. Beelzebub, carried away by gormandism, had made up its mind, notwithstanding its fears, to abandon the safe position it held on the cornice of the sideboard, having successfully reasoned out that it would

be difficult for any one to pull its ears, since it had none, and that nobody could indulge at its expense in the coarse joke of tying a stewpan to its tail, in view of the fact that its lack of a tail forbade that sort of pleasantry, worthier of rascals than of well-bred people such as seemed to be those seated round the table, laden with food of unusual juiciness and perfume. It had therefore turned the darkness to account and had drawn near, crawling along the floor, and so completely flattened out that its elbows showed above its body, like a panther's watching a gazelle. Nobody had noticed it, and having reached the Baron de Sigognac's chair, it had stood up and, with the object of attracting its master's attention, performed a guitar air upon his knee with its claws. Sigognac, indulgent to the humble friend that had starved so long in his service, made it share his good fortune, and handed it under the table bones and bits of meat that Beelzebub received with frantic joy. Miraut also, having managed to enter into the banqueting-hall by following close on Peter's footsteps, came in for more than one good mouthful.

The dead house seemed to have revived, filled as it was with light, warmth, and noise. The actresses, who had drunk a little wine, were chattering like parrots on

a perch, and were exchanging compliments on their respective successes. The Pedant and the Tyrant were disputing about the relative superiority of the tragic and the comic poem; the one maintaining that it was more difficult to make well-bred people laugh than it was to frighten them by nursery tales of horror that had no other merit than that they were old; the other insisting that the scurrility and buffoonery comic writers made use of greatly lowered these authors. The Leander had drawn a small mirror from his pocket, and was gazing upon himself with as much satisfaction as Narcissus of old gazed upon his features in the brook. Contrary to custom, he was not in love with the Isabella; he aimed higher. He hoped, by his graces and his gentlemanly ways, to catch the eye of some inflammable dowager, whose four-horse coach would call for him after the performance and convey him to some mansion where the sensitive fair, in the most gallant of négligés, would be awaiting him ready to share a most delicious meal. Had the dream ever come true? Leander swore it had, but Scappino maintained it had not, and this gave rise to endless disputes between the pair. The wicked valet, as full of mischief as a monkey, affirmed that the poor wretch in vain ogled the ladies,

cast killing glances at the boxes, laughed so as to show his complete set of teeth, turned out his leg, drew himself up, combed his wig and changed his linen for every performance, even at the cost of having to do without breakfast in order to pay the laundress' bill, — that he had not once yet succeeded in inspiring the least desire in the breast of any baroness, even of forty-five, with a face full of pimples and with plainly evident mustaches.

Scappino, observing Leander occupied with his dream, had cleverly brought up the question again, and the angry lady-killer offered to fetch out of his luggage a box filled with love-letters scented with musk and benzoin, and addressed to him by innumerable ladies of rank, countesses, marchionesses, and baronesses, every one madly in love with him; wherein the fop did not boast quite untruthfully, for the fad of intriguing with play-actors and performers was rather wide-spread at that period of relaxed morals. Serafina declared that had she happened to be one of these dames, she would have Leander thrashed for his impertinence and indiscreetness, while Isabella playfully threatened that if he did not show himself more modest, she would not marry him at the end of the play. Sigognac, although a prey to the most distressing timidity,

so that he could only stammer broken sentences, greatly admired the Isabella, and his eyes spoke more eloquently than his lips. The young girl had perceived the effect she was producing upon the Baron, and replied to his looks by languorous glances that drove the Hector to despair, for he was secretly in love with the beauty, though quite hopelessly so, in view of his grotesque part. A cleverer and bolder man than Sigognac would have pressed his advantage, but the poor Baron had had no opportunity to learn court manners in his ruinous mansion, and though he lacked neither wit nor culture, he showed for the time to very poor effect.

The ten bottles had been religiously emptied, and the Pedant overset the last, making the last drop shine on his thumb-nail. The Swashbuckler understood the meaning of the act, and went down to the court-yard to fetch additional bottles. The Baron, though already somewhat tipsy, could not refrain from draining a bumper to the health of the ladies, and that finished him.

The Pedant and the Tyrant drank like seasoned topers who, if never entirely sober, are never, on the other hand, quite drunk. The Hector was sober after the Spanish fashion, and could easily have lived like the

hidalgoes who make a dinner off three olives in their pockets and sup off an air on the mandolin. There was a reason for his frugality: he feared, if he ate and drank too freely, to lose the phenomenal leanness that had proved his most trusty comic resource. If he grew stout, his talent diminished, so that he lived only on condition of starving; he was continually worried about himself, and he kept watching his belt in order to note whether, by any chance, he had grown bulkier since the night before. A voluntary Tantalus, an abstemious comedian, a martyr to leanness, a self-dissected anatomy, he merely trifled with his food, and had he applied his fasts to some pious purpose, would have been in Paradise along with Saints Anthony and Macarius.

The duenna was gorging herself with both solids and liquids in amazing fashion, her flabby jowls and chins quivering as they were set in motion by a pair of jaws still well garnished with teeth. As for the Serafina and the Isabella, having no fans at hand, they were rivalling each other in yawning behind the diaphanous rampart of their pretty hands. Sigognac, though somewhat overcome by the fumes of the wine, perceived this and said to them: —

"Ladies, I can see that though your good breeding leads you to struggle against slumber, you are desperately inclined to go to sleep. I wish I could offer each of you a properly tapestried room, with wide space on either side the bed and a dressing-room, but my poor house is falling in ruins, like my race, of which I am the last representative. I beg you will take my chamber, which is about the only one into which the rain does not penetrate. You will have to settle yourselves in it to the best of your ability, with Madam; the bed is roomy and the night will soon be past. These gentlemen will have to remain here and to make shift with the arm-chairs and chairs. Let me put you on your guard against being frightened by the flapping of the tapestry, the moaning of the wind in the chimney, and the scampering of the mice. I can assure you that, gloomy as the place is, it is not in the least haunted."

"I play the part of Bradamante, and I am no coward," said the Serafina laughingly. "I shall reassure the timid Isabella, and as for our duenna, she is a bit of a witch, and if the devil should turn up, she will be a match for him."

Sigognac, taking up a light, showed the ladies to the bedroom, which did indeed impress them as being rather

a weird place, for the flickering flame of the lamp, blown about by the draughts, caused strange shadows to undulate upon the beams of the ceiling, while monstrous shapes seemed to be crouching in the dark corners.

"What a capital setting for the fifth act of a tragedy," said the Serafina, casting a glance around her, while Isabella was unable to repress a shudder, due partly to the cold, partly to fear, as she felt herself caught in the dark and dank atmosphere.

The three ladies slipped, fully dressed, under the blankets, Isabella placing herself between the Serafina and the duenna, so that in the event of the hairy paw of a phantom or a succubus emerging from underneath the bed, it should first touch one of her companions. The two braver women soon fell asleep, but the timid young girl long kept her wide-open eyes upon the unused door, as though she felt that beyond it lay a whole world of ghosts and nocturnal horrors. The door, however, did not open; no spectre, clad in a shroud and clanking its chains, issued from it, although strange noises made themselves heard at times in the deserted chambers; and at last sleep filled timid Isabella's eyes with its golden dust, and her regular

breathing soon sounded along with the louder respiration of her companions.

The Pedant was sleeping soundly, his nose on the table, opposite the Tyrant, who was snoring like an organ-pipe and muttering, as he dreamed, fragmentary lines. The Swashbuckler, his head resting on the back of an arm-chair and his feet stretched out on the andirons, had wrapped himself up in his gray cloak, and looked like a herring done up in paper. Leander, in order not to spoil the curl of his hair, was sleeping stiffly with his head held up. Sigognac had settled himself in an arm-chair, but the events of the night had so overexcited him that he could not manage to doze.

It is impossible for two young women to suddenly break into a young man's life without upsetting it, especially when the young man has up to that time lived a dull, chaste, lonely life, and has been kept from all the pleasures of his age by that harsh stepmother called poverty.

It may be urged that it is quite improbable that a young fellow should have reached the age of twenty without having had a love affair, but Sigognac was proud and remained at home since he could not go forth in a style consonant with his rank and name. His relatives,

whose assistance he might have asked for without humiliation, were dead; day by day he had sunk deeper into solitude and forgetfulness. He had, it is true, in the course of his solitary rambles, occasionally come across Yolande de Foix, mounted on her white palfrey and hunting the stag in company with her father and a number of young noblemen. The dazzling vision often recurred to him in his dreams; but what relations could there ever be between the beautiful and rich heiress and himself, a poor ruined country noble, lacking in this world's goods? Far from courting her notice, he had, whenever he met her, kept as far as possible in the background, not caring to excite laughter by the sight of his wretched, battered felt hat, his rat-eaten feathers, his worn and plainly too large garments, and his quiet nag, fitter to carry a village priest than a gentleman; for there is nothing so painful to a feeling heart as to appear ridiculous in the eyes of the beloved one. He had therefore recalled, in order to master his nascent passion, all the cold reasons inspired by poverty. But whether he had succeeded or not is what I cannot tell. He thought he had, at least, and had repelled the thought of love as being a mere chimera; he felt unhappy enough as it was,

without adding to his pain the torments of a hopeless passion.

The night passed without other incident than the startling of Isabella by Beelzebub, that had curled itself up on her bosom, after the manner of Smarra, and refused to move, as it was very comfortable. As for Sigognac, he could not close his eyes, either because he was not used to sleeping out of his own bed or because the presence of the young women had upset his brain. I am rather of opinion that a vague plan was beginning to take shape in his brain and kept him wakeful and perplexed. The advent of the players seemed to him a stroke of fate, an embassy sent by Fortune to invite him to leave the feudal barracks in which he was wasting the years of his youth and pining away uselessly.

Day was breaking and gray morn, filtering in through the panes set in lead, made the yellow light of the dying lamps look livid and ghastly. The faces of the sleepers were strangely illumined by the double gleams, that divided them into two distinct halves, like mediæval surcoats. The Leander had acquired the tone of an old wax candle, and resembled the wax figures of Saint John the Baptist that are adorned with silk wigs, and from whose faces the rouge has fallen off in spite

of the protection of the glass case. The Hector, his eyes carefully closed, his cheek-bones prominent, his maxillary muscles on the stretch, his nose as sharp as if it had been pinched by Death's lean fingers, looked like his own dead body. The Pedant's phiz was marked with brilliant red patches and apoplectic spots; the rubies on his nose had turned to amethysts, and the bluish bloom of wine stained his lips. A few drops of perspiration, rolling down through the ravines and counterscarps of his forehead, had been caught in the bushes of his gray eyebrows, and his flabby cheeks hung loosely. His face, which when awake and vivified by the mind, had a jovial look, was hideous when thus sunk in drunken sleep, and as he lay bending over the edge of the table, the Pedant looked like an old Ægipan overcome by debauch and tumbled into the side of a ditch after a bacchanalian orgy. The Tyrant with his colourless face and his black beard kept up pretty well; his face, half that of a kind-hearted Hercules and half that of a benignant executioner, could scarcely change.

The maid also stood fairly well the indiscreet glimpses of day; she was not particularly dishevelled; only darker circles round her eyes and a few violet tones on her cheeks betokened fatigue due to a bad

night's rest. A lascivious sunbeam, shooting past the empty bottles, the half-drained glasses, and the ravaged dishes, caressed the chin and lips of the girl like a faun teasing a sleeping nymph. The chaste dowagers on the greenery-yallery tapestry did their best to blush under their varnish at the sight of their solitude rudely disturbed by this gipsy encampment, and the banquet-hall had an air at once sinister and grotesque.

The maid was the first to wake to the kiss of morn; she rose, shook out her skirts in the way a bird shakes out its feathers, passed her hand over her hair to smooth it, and seeing that Baron de Sigognac was seated in his arm-chair, his eye as bright as a basilisk's, she went towards him and dropped him a pretty stage curtsey.

"I regret," said Sigognac, as he returned the maid's salutation, "that the ruinous condition of this place, better fitted to be a home for ghosts than for living beings, has prevented my entertaining you in a more suitable manner. I wish I could have had you resting between sheets of Holland linen and under a counterpane of Indian damask, instead of having to let you tire yourself out on that worm-eaten chair."

"There is no reason for regret, sir," replied the maid. "But for you we should have spent the night in our

caravan stuck in a mud-hole, shivering in the driving rain, and the morning would have found us in a parlous state indeed. Besides, this place for which you profess contempt is a palace by the side of the draughty barns where, one and all, tyrants and victims, princes and princesses, Leanders and maids, we have perforce to sleep on trusses of hay in the course of our wandering players' life as we pass from town to town."

While the Baron and the soubrette were engaged in this exchange of civilities, the Pedant rolled to the floor with a noise of breaking wood. His seat, unable longer to support his weight, had given way under him, and the corpulent old fellow, stretched out with his legs in the air, was kicking about like a turtle turned over on its back and uttering inarticulate cluckings. In falling he had instinctively caught at the table cloth, and thus caused a smash of crockery that poured over him. The noise awoke the whole company, and the Tyrant, after having stretched out his arms and rubbed his eyes, held out a helping hand to the poor old buffoon and set him up on his pins again.

"That sort of accident would never happen to our Hector," said the Herod, uttering a sort of deep-chested

grunt that stood him in the way of a laugh. "He could fall into a cobweb without injuring it."

"Quite true," replied the artist referred to, stretching out his long, spider-like limbs; "for every one is not so fortunate as to be a Polyphemus, a Cacus, a mass of flesh and blood like you, or a wine-sack, a walking hogshead like Blazius."

The noise had brought to their door the Isabella, the Serafina and the duenna. The two younger women, though somewhat fatigued and wan, were still charming when seen by daylight. Sigognac thought he had never seen anything so dazzling, notwithstanding the fact that a somewhat particular observer might have objected to certain details of their attire, the elegance of which had somewhat lost its freshness and newness; but what signify a few faded ribbons, a few breadths of stuff showing worn and shiny, a few defects and incongruities in dress, when the wearers of the costumes are young and pretty? Besides, the Baron's eyes, accustomed to the sight of old, dusty, faded, and ragged clothes, failed to note such trifles; the Serafina and the Isabella appeared to him to be dressed superbly, when he beheld them in the gloomy mansion where everything was decaying. As he looked

at their graceful figures, he believed himself to be dreaming.

The duenna enjoyed, in virtue of her age, the privilege of unchanging ugliness, and nothing could alter her wooden face, in which the features seemed to be carved, and in which shone a couple of owl-like eyes. Sunlight or candle-light made no difference to her.

At this moment Peter entered to put the room in order, to replenish the fire, in which a few smouldering sticks of wood were disappearing under a layer of ashes, and to clear away the remains of the meal, so repugnant once hunger has been satisfied.

The fire shining on the hearth, and licking a backplate bearing the arms of the Sigognacs, little accustomed to such caresses, collected the whole company round the hearth and lighted it up with its brilliant gleams. A brightly burning fire is always pleasant after a night that, if not sleepless, has not been one of sound sleep, and the discomfort exhibited on every face in the form of grimaces or more or less plain marks, vanished utterly, thanks to this beneficent influence. Isabella held out to the flame the palms of her little hands, flushed with rose, and her face illumined by the glow lost its pallor. Donna Serafina, taller and more robust,

stood behind her like an elder sister who, being less fatigued, allows her junior to sit down. As for the Swashbuckler, perched on one of his heron-like legs, he was dreaming half-awake like a water-bird on the edge of a pool, its beak in its ruff and one foot drawn up under its body. Blazius, the Pedant, was licking his lips and examining one bottle after another to ascertain whether it held perchance a drop of liquor.

The young Baron had drawn Peter aside to find out whether it might be possible to obtain in the village a few dozen eggs or some chickens to be killed for the company's breakfast, and Peter had hastened off to execute the commission, the players having expressed their intention of making an early start in order to make a long stage of it and to reach their sleeping-place before it became late.

"I am much afraid that you will have but a poor breakfast," said Sigognac to his guests, "and you will have to put up with Pythagorean fare. Yet a poor breakfast is better than none, and there is not a single tavern or pot-house within twenty miles. You can see from the condition of the castle that I am not rich, but as my poverty is due to my ancestors having spent

their means in fighting for the King, I have no reason to blush for it."

"No, indeed, sir," returned the Herod in his base voice; "many a man who boasts of his wealth would care little to say how he came by it. Contractors may dress in cloth of gold, while noblemen have cloaks full of holes, but honour shows through the rags."

"What I am surprised at," said Blazius, "is that an accomplished gentleman, such as you appear to be, sir, should be content to waste his youth in a retreat where fortune cannot find him, however desirous it may be of doing so. If it did happen to pass by this castle, which may have been a very fine building two hundred years ago, it would proceed on its way, believing the place to be uninhabited. You ought to go to Paris, sir, the eye and centre of the world, the meeting-place of wits and brave men, the Eldorado and land of Canaan of French Spaniards and of Christian Hebrews, the blessed country illumined by the rays of the sun of the Court. There you would not fail to have your merits recognised and to make your way, either by attaching yourself to some great noble or by performing some distinguished action, an opportunity for which would speedily present itself."

The old man's words, in spite of their farrago and the burlesque form in which they were couched,— involuntary reminiscences of the parts of pedants he was accustomed to play, — did not lack sense. Sigognac felt this, and indeed, in the course of his long rambles across the barrens, he had often said to himself what Blazius had just given expression to.

But he had not the means to undertake so long a trip, and he knew not where to turn to obtain them. He was proud as well as brave, and feared a smile more than a sword-thrust. Without being familiar with fashions, he felt that he looked ridiculous in his outworn garments, that had been old-fashioned years before, and like those whom poverty makes timid, he did not take into account his personal advantages, and looked upon his condition from the unpleasant side only. Possibly he might have obtained some assistance from the former friends of his father by merely cultivating them a little, but such an effort was beyond his powers, and he would rather have starved to death, seated on a chest by the side of his coat of arms and chewing a tooth-pick like a Spanish don, than have asked for aid or a loan. He was one of those men who, when invited to partake of an excellent meal,

pretend, though starving, to have dined rather than be suspected of being hungry.

"I have often thought of doing so, but I have no friends in Paris, and the descendants of those who knew my family when it was rich and its members filled offices at Court, would scarcely welcome a wan and lean Sigognac swooping down upon them with beak and talons to secure his share of the spoil. Besides, — I do not see why I should be ashamed to say it, — I have no equipage, and I could not present myself on a footing worthy of my name. I do not believe that even if I put together all that I have and whatever Peter may possess, I could manage to reach Paris."

"But you are not bound to enter the great city in triumph, like a Roman Cæsar on a car drawn by four white steeds," answered Blazius. "If our lowly ox-cart is not repugnant to your lordship's pride, come to Paris with us, since we are bound thither. Many a man now occupying an exalted station has entered the capital on foot, carrying his bundle at the end of his rapier and his shoes in his hand for fear of wearing them out."

Sigognac blushed, half from shame, half from desire. On the one hand his pride of race revolted at the

thought of being under an obligation to a poor strolling player, but, on the other, his natural kindness of heart was touched by an offer made so cordially and which gratified his secret wishes. He feared, besides, to wound the actor's self-love by a refusal, and perhaps to miss an opportunity that might not occur again. No doubt there was something shocking in the thought of the descendant of the Sigognacs travelling on the car of Thespis pell-mell with nomadic players, that would certainly cause the unicorns and the lions, langued gules, on his coat of arms to neigh and roar, but after all the young Baron had starved himself long enough within his feudal mansion.

He wavered and hesitated to say "yes" or "no," weighing the two decisive monosyllables in the scales of reflection, when Isabella, approaching him with a gracious air, and standing before the Baron and Blazius, spoke the following words, that put an end to the young man's hesitation: —

"Our poet, having come in for a legacy, has left us, and you might take his place, sir, for I unwittingly found, on opening a copy of Ronsard lying on the table by your bed, a sonnet with many corrections that you must surely have written. You could arrange our parts,

make the necessary cuts and additions, and, at need, write a piece on a subject suggested to you. It so happens that I have an Italian plot in which there would be a very pretty part for me, if any one would work it up."

As she said this, Isabella cast upon the Baron a glance that was so sweet and so penetrating that he could not resist it. Peter's arrival, with a huge omelet and a fairly large ham, broke up the conversation. The whole company sat down to table and fell to with a good appetite. Sigognac himself merely tasted, out of politeness, of the viands placed before him, for his usual temperate habits did not fit in with meals so close to each other; and besides, his mind was filled with other matters.

The breakfast over, and while the ox-driver was twisting the yoke-thongs round the horns of the oxen, Isabella and Serafina expressed a wish to visit the garden which they could see from the court-yard.

"I am afraid," said Sigognac as he offered them his hand to aid them to descend the disjointed, moss-covered steps, "that you may leave pieces of your gowns on the brambles; for though the proverb says there is no rose without a thorn, there are, on the other hand, many thorns without roses."

The young Baron had uttered these words in the tone of melancholy and irony customary with him when he alluded to his poverty, but, as if the depreciated garden had piqued itself on its capabilities, two little wild roses, their five petals partially opened round their yellow pistils, unexpectedly shone upon a projecting branch that barred the way of the young ladies. Sigognac picked the roses and gallantly offered them to Isabella and Serafina, saying: —

"I did not think my flower beds had so much bloom about them. It is weeds only that grow here, and the only nosegays we can pick are made up of nettles and hemlock. It is your presence that has caused these two flowers to blossom here, like a smile upon a sorrowful face, putting a touch of poetry upon the ruins."

Isabella carefully fastened the eglantine blossom in the bosom of her dress, and cast upon the young man a long glance of thanks that testified to the value the humble gift possessed in her eyes. Serafina, biting the stem of her flower, kept it between her lips, as if to contrast their ruby colour with the pale rose flush of the blossom.

In this way they proceeded as far as the mythological statue which showed at the end of the walk, Sigo-

gnac holding aside the branches that might have swished in the ladies' faces as they passed along. The younger girl gazed with tender interest at the uncultivated garden which was so thoroughly in harmony with the ruinous castle. She thought of the sad hours Sigognac must have spent in that home of dulness, poverty and solitude, his brow pressed against the window-pane, his eyes fixed upon the deserted road, with no other company than a black cat and a white dog. Serafina's harder features expressed only cold contempt concealed by politeness; in her opinion, the young nobleman was altogether too unkempt, even though she did entertain a certain amount of respect for persons of title.

"Here end my domains," said the Baron on reaching the rock-work niche in which the statue of Pomona was mouldering away. "Formerly the hills and the plains, the fields and the moors, as far as the eye can reach, belonged to my ancestors; now I have just enough left to enable me to await the time when the last of the Sigognacs shall join his forefathers in the family vault, our only possession."

"It is very early in the day for you to be so gloomy," said Isabella, touched by the reflection, which had oc-

curred to her also, but assuming a playful air in order to dispel the cloud of sadness that had gathered on Sigognac's brow. "Fortune is a woman, and though said to be blind, she does sometimes from the top of her wheel distinguish in the crowd a man of rank and merit; all one has to do is to put one's self in her way. Come, make up your mind to accompany us, and in a few years, perhaps, the towers of Sigognac, roofed with new slates, restored and whitewashed, will look as proud as they now look pitiful; besides," she added in a low voice, so as not to be heard by Serafina, "it would really pain me to leave you behind in this owl's-nest."

The sweet light that shone in Isabella's eyes overcame the Baron's repugnance. The attraction of a love-affair made up, in his view, for the possible humiliation involved in a trip undertaken under such conditions. There was no loss of rank attached to the following of an actress for love's sake, to the accompanying a players' van in the character of a suitor, for the most accomplished cavalier would not hesitate to do so. The quiver-bearing god is fond of compelling gods and heroes to do the strangest things and to assume the most extraordinary disguises; Jupiter put on the shape of a bull in order to seduce Europa; Hercules

spun at the feet of Omphale; the wise Aristotle went on all-fours, carrying his mistress on his back because she wanted to ride on philosopherback (a curious kind of mount!); every one of these performances being contrary to divine and to human dignity. But was Sigognac in love with Isabella? He himself did not attempt to fathom the riddle; he only felt that it would be horribly dull for him to remain in the castle that had been enlivened for a moment by the presence of a young and lovely girl.

Consequently he soon made up his mind, and begging the players to wait a moment for him, he drew Peter aside and confided his purpose to him. Although the faithful servant suffered at the thought of parting with his master, he clearly perceived the disadvantages of a longer stay in Sigognac. He had watched with sorrow the young man's youth wasting away in gloomy idleness and indolent sadness, and while a company of strolling players struck him as being an inappropriate escort for a lord of Sigognac, he nevertheless preferred this mode of trying his luck to the deep atony that for two or three years past more particularly had mastered the young Baron. It did not take him long to fill a valise with the few belongings of his master, and to

put into a leather purse the scanty pistoles scattered in the drawers of the old cupboard, to which he took care to add, without saying a word about it, his own poor savings, a piece of devotion which the Baron possibly did not notice. In addition to the various offices filled by him in the castle, Peter had also to discharge the functions of treasurer, a perfect sinecure.

The white nag was saddled, for Sigognac proposed to ride in the players' van only when some six or eight miles from the castle, to conceal his departure. In that way, he would look as if he were accompanying his guests on their road. Peter was to follow on foot and bring the animal back to the stable.

The oxen were harnessed and were trying, in spite of the heavy yoke that weighed down their heads, to raise their wet black noses, from which dropped filaments of silvery saliva. The sort of red and yellow esparto tiaras that crowned their heads, and the white linen rugs that were wrapped round them like shirts, in order to protect them from the attacks of flies, gave them a most majestic and Mithra-like look. Standing in front of them, the driver, a tall young fellow, as tanned and shy as a shepherd of the Roman Campagna, leaned upon the pole of his goad in an attitude that

recalled, unwittingly no doubt, that of Greek heroes on antique *bassi-relievi*. Isabella and Serafina had taken their seats on the front of the chariot in order to enjoy the prospect; the duenna, the Pedant, and the Leander were at the back, more desirous of indulging in another sleep than of viewing the moor landscape. Everybody was ready; the driver touched up the oxen; the animals bent their heads, strained on their bow-legs, and started; the chariot got under way, the woodwork plained, the insufficiently greased axles creaked, and the vault of the porch echoed the heavy tread of the team. They were off.

During the course of these preparations Beelzebub and Miraut, grasping the fact that something unusual was going on, kept coming and going with an air of surprise and anxiety, racking their imperfect animal brains in search of the explanation of the presence of so many people in a usually deserted place. The dog trotted aimlessly from Peter to his master with eager, questioning glance, and growled at the strangers. The cat, more reflective, cautiously smelt the wheels, examined the oxen from a safer distance, their bulk impressing it greatly, and prudently springing backwards when they unexpectedly turned their horns in its

direction. Then it would sit down in front of the old white nag, with which it was on confidential footing, and seemed to ask it questions. The good old steed bent its head down towards the cat, that put up its own, and as it wrinkled back its gray lips, on which bristled some long hairs, for the purpose, no doubt, of chewing a bit of fodder caught between its teeth, it really looked as though it were conversing with its feline friend. What was the nature of the communication? Democritus, who claimed to translate the speech of animals, alone could have understood it. However it may be, the fact remains that after this wordless talk, the gist of which was conveyed by Beelzebub to Miraut in a number of winks and a few plaintive cries, the cat seemed to have got at the meaning of the commotion. When the Baron had mounted and had picked up the reins, Miraut placed himself on the right and Beelzebub on the left of the nag, and the lord of Sigognac left his ancestral home between his dog and his cat. It was plain that before venturing forth in a way so unusual in its species the prudent cat had guessed its master had come to some momentous decision.

On the point of leaving his gloomy home, Sigognac

felt himself filled with sorrow. He cast another long look upon the walls black with mildew and green with moss, every stone of which he knew; upon the towers with their rusty vanes that he had so often gazed upon during long weary hours with a fixed, inattentive stare; at the windows of the desolate chambers he had so often traversed as though he were a spectre haunting an accursed castle, and almost afraid of the sound of his own footsteps; at the waste garden in which toads hopped about on the damp ground and adders glided between the brambles; at the chapel with its fallen-in roof and crumbling arches, the rubbish covering the lichen-coated tombstones under which slept side by side his father and his mother, the latter a gracious image, dim as the remembrance of a dream, that he had scarcely caught a glimpse of in his earliest childhood. He thought also of the portraits in the gallery which had kept him company in his solitude and smiled upon him for twenty years with their fixed smiles; of the duck-hunter on the tapestry; of his four-poster bed, the pillow of which he had so often wetted with his tears. And all those things, old and mean, dull and grim, dusty and drowsy, that had filled him with such intense loathing and weariness, now appeared to him

endowed with a charm he had failed to perceive. He considered himself ungrateful towards the poor old dismantled home that, after all, had sheltered him to the best of its ability, and that had persisted, in spite of its age, in keeping up in order that it should not crush him in its fall, like some octogenarian servant that remains standing on his shaky legs so long as the master is there. Many a bitter sweetness, many a sad pleasure, many a happy sorrow came crowding back into his mind; habit, life's pale, slow-footed companion, seated on the well-known threshold, turned upon him its eyes filled with hopeless tenderness as it repeated a refrain of his childhood, a refrain of the nursery, in an irresistibly low voice, and as he crossed the porch it seemed to him that an invisible hand was plucking at his cloak to make him turn back.

When he emerged from the gate, riding on ahead of the chariot, a gust of wind wafted to him the fresh scent of the heather washed by the rain, the sweet and penetrating aroma of the native land. A distant bell was tinkling, and its silvery vibrations were brought to him on the wings of the same breeze that was conveying the scent of the moors. It was too much for him, and Sigognac, seized with profound home-sickness

though he was but a few yards from his dwelling, made a movement to turn back; the old nag was already turning its head in the direction indicated, with more alertness than seemed compatible with its years; Miraut and Beelzebub simultaneously looked up, as if aware of what was passing in their master's mind, and staying their steps fixed upon him questioning eyes. But the half-turn resulted in a very different way from what might have been expected, for it caused Sigognac's glance to meet that of Isabella, and the young girl's was full of such caressing languor and of so plain though mute a prayer that the Baron felt himself turn pale and red in turns; he completely forgot the creviced walls of his manor, the scent of the heather, the tinkling of the bell, that nevertheless kept up its sorrowful call, abruptly slapped his horse with the bridle, and drove it on with a vigorous pressure of the leg. The struggle was over: Isabella had conquered.

The chariot followed the road I spoke of at the outset of this tale, driving the terrified frogs from out the ruts filled with the rain. When the main road was reached and the oxen were enabled to draw the lumbering vehicle to which they were harnessed at a better pace upon dryer ground, Sigognac dropped back from the

van to the rear-guard, not wishing to exhibit too much attention towards Isabella, and also, perhaps, in order to indulge more freely the thoughts that filled his mind.

The pepper-pot turrets of Sigognac were already half-hidden behind the clumps of trees; the Baron rose in his stirrups to have a last look at them, and as he glanced down on the ground, he saw Miraut and Beelzebub, whose doleful countenances expressed the greatest grief that can be read on animals' faces. Miraut, profiting by the stop involved in the contemplation of the towers of the old home braced his stiffened muscles and tried to leap up to his master's face in order to lick it a last time. Sigognac, guessing at the poor beast's intention, seized it, just below his boot-top, by the too loose scruff of the neck, dragged it up to the pommel of the saddle, and kissed its nose, black and rough like a truffle, without any attempt to avoid the wet caress with which the grateful animal covered his mustache. While this was going on, Beelzebub, more agile and aiding itself with its still sharp claws, had escaladed on the other side Sigognac's boot and thigh, and showing its crop-eared black head on the level of the holsters was purring in formidable fashion and rolling its great yellow eyes. It also was begging

for a gesture of farewell. The young Baron stroked the cat's head two or three times, as it arched its back and cuddled close to enjoy the more the loving touch. I hope my readers will not laugh at my hero, when I tell them that the humble proofs of affection of these creatures, that have no souls but are full of feeling, filled him with deep emotion, and that two tears, coming from his heart with a sob, fell upon the heads of Miraut and Beelzebub, baptising them friends of their master, in the human sense of the word.

The two animals followed Sigognac for a time with their eyes; he had trotted off to rejoin the chariot; and when they had lost sight of him where the road curved they fraternally returned to the mansion.

The storm of the previous night had not left upon the sandy soil of the moors the traces that denote abundant rain in less sterile districts; the landscape, that had been merely refreshed, had a sort of rustic beauty. The heather, cleansed of its dusty covering by the rain, carpeted the slopes on either side the road with clumps of violet blossoms; the reeds, green once more, waved their golden blooms; the water plants spread out on the refilled pools; the pines themselves shook their sombre foliage in less funereal

fashion and gave out a balsamic scent; wisps of blue smoke rising gaily from a clump of chestnut trees indicated the home of a farmer, while on the rolling downs stretching as far as the eye could reach the scattered sheep looked like spots as they grazed under the guard of a shepherd dreaming away on top of his stilts. On the verge of the horizon the distant summits of the Pyrenees, half-blurred by the haze of an autumn morning, showed like archipelagoes of white clouds shaded with azure.

At times the road sank between two banks, the fallen slopes of which were of sand white as ground sandstone, while on their crests grew thick shrubs and tangled plants that swished against the hood of the passing chariot. In some places the ground was so soft that it had been necessary to strengthen the roadway by putting down cross pine-trunks, that gave rise to bumps and jolts which caused the actresses to shriek loudly. In other places they had to cross shaky culverts over pools of stagnant water or brooks that cut the road. At every dangerous place Sigognac helped Isabella, more timid or less lazy than Serafina and the duenna, to descend from the van. As for the Tyrant and Blazius, they were sleeping soundly, jolted between the

boxes, after the fashion of men who had been through a good deal worse than this. The Hector was walking by the side of the chariot in order to preserve, by this exercise, his phenomenal leanness, of which he was most careful. Seen from afar lifting up his long legs, he would have been taken for a field spider walking through the corn. He made such long strides that he often had to stop and await the rest of the company; for having acquired in the performance of his parts the habit of swinging the hips forward and stalking on like a pair of compasses, he could not get rid of that gait, whether he were in town or in the country, and invariably strode along.

Ox-carts do not progress very rapidly, especially on the moors, where the wheels occasionally sink into the sand up to the axles, and where the road can be distinguished from the surrounding wastes only by ruts a foot or two deep. Therefore, although the stout cattle, bending their muscular necks, were bravely hauling in obedience to the driver's goad, they had not gone more than six miles ere the sun was already high in the heavens. It is true that these were local miles, as long as a day of starvation, and very much like the miles that, after the first fortnight, must have marked the love

rests of the couples charged by Pantagruel to set up milestones in his fair realm of Mirebalais. The peasants met on the way, carrying a bundle of grass or of sticks, were becoming less numerous, and the moor spread out in its desert bareness as wild as a Spanish *despoblado* or a South American pampa. Sigognac, considering there was no use in tiring out his old nag, alighted, and threw the reins to the old servant, whose face, in spite of many a layer of sunburn, was visibly pale from deep emotion. The moment of parting had come for master and man; a painful moment, for Peter had seen Sigognac born, and he was the Baron's humble friend rather than his servant.

"God be with your lordship," said Peter, bending over the hand the Baron held out to him, "and may He restore the fortunes of the Sigognacs. I am sorry that He has not willed that I should accompany your lordship."

"What could I have done with you, my poor Peter, in the new life I am entering upon? My means are so small that I really could not throw upon fate the burden of looking after two of us. In the castle you will always manage to get along somehow; our former farmers will not allow their master's faithful friend to

starve. Besides, the old home of the Sigognacs must not be wholly deserted and handed over to owls and serpents as though it were a hovel visited by Death and haunted by ghosts. The soul of the old home lives still in me, and as long as I live there shall be at its gate a porter to prevent the children from practising with their slings at our coat of arms as a target."

The servant nodded assent, for, like all old domestics of noble families, he worshipped the manor house, and Sigognac, in spite of its crevices, its state of disrepair, and its wretchedness, seemed to him still one of the finest residences in the world.

"And then," added the Baron with a smile, "who would take care of Bayard, Miraut, and Beelzebub?"

"That is true, master," answered Peter, as he took Bayard's bridle, while Sigognac was patting its neck by way of caress and farewell.

On parting from its master the good steed neighed repeatedly, and Sigognac long heard, fainter as the distance grew, the loving call of the grateful animal.

Left alone, he experienced the feeling people have when they have taken ship, and their friends have left them at the end of the jetty. That is perhaps the saddest moment of the departure; the world one has

been living in is being left behind and one hastens to join the other travellers, so lonely and sad does one feel, and so urgently do the eyes call for a human face to look upon. Sigognac therefore quickened his steps to catch up the chariot that rolled heavily along, the sand creaking as the wheels furrowed it.

On seeing Sigognac walking by the van, Isabella complained of being uncomfortable in her seat, and asked to be allowed to get down, in order to stretch her limbs, she said, but in reality with the kindly intention of not leaving the young nobleman a prey to his melancholy thoughts and to distract him by her gay chatter.

The veil of sadness that covered Sigognac's face was dispelled as a sunbeam dispels a cloud, when the young girl asked for the support of his arm to walk for a little distance on the road that here happened to be smooth.

They were walking thus side by side, Isabella reciting some passages from one of her parts that she was not quite satisfied with and that she desired him to alter, when the blast of a horn suddenly sounded on the right of the road in a coppice. The branches parted before the chests of the horses, and young Yolande de Foix burst into the middle of the road in all the splendour

of a huntswoman. The excitement of the chase had mantled her cheeks with a deeper red, her breath came quick, and her bosom rose and fell faster under the velvet and gold of her bodice. A few tears in her long skirt, a few scratches on the flanks of her horse proved that the intrepid Amazon feared neither copse nor thicket, and although the noble steed's ardour did not require to be excited, and its veins, filled with generous blood, stood out like whipcord upon its white, foam-flecked neck, she was touching it up with a whip, the pommel of which was formed of an amethyst engraved with her arms. The horse was curveting and prancing, to the great admiration of three or four richly dressed and splendidly mounted young noblemen, who applauded the grace and boldness of the new Bradamante.

"Pray look," she said to the three swains who galloped by her side, "pray look at Baron de Sigognac escorting a gipsy!"

And the group passed on in a cloud of dust with a burst of laughter. Sigognac flushed with anger and shame, and quickly put his hand on the hilt of his sword; but he was on foot, and it would have been madness to run after people on horseback, to say nothing of the fact that he could not call out Yolande. A

tender, submissive glance from the actress soon made him forget the insolent look of the noble lady.

The day passed without further incident, and at about four in the afternoon the party reached the place where they were to dine and sleep.

At Sigognac the evening proved gloomy; the portraits looked grimmer and more sullen even than usual, impossible though it seemed; the stairs sounded more sonorously and more emptily; the rooms appeared to have grown larger and barer; in the long passages the wind moaned weirdly, and the spiders, restless and anxious, came down from the ceilings spinning long threads; the crevices in the wall yawned wide like jaws distended by weariness. The ruinous old house seemed to know its young master had gone, and to mourn over his departure.

Under the mantel of the chimney Peter was sharing his scanty meal with Miraut and Beelzebub, by the smoky light of a resin torch, and in the stable Bayard could be heard pulling at his chain and biting at his crib.

III

THE INN OF THE BLUE SUN

THE place where the tired oxen stopped of themselves, shaking with an air of satisfaction the long filaments of saliva hanging from their moist muzzles, was a wretched collection of huts that in any place less wild would not have been dignified with the name of hamlet even. It consisted of five or six shanties scattered under fairly large trees, the growth of which had been favoured by the presence of a little loam, increased by manure and detritus of all sorts. The cabins, constructed of clay, small stones, roughly dressed logs or boards, and covered with big thatched roofs, brown and mossy, that reached almost to the ground, and the sheds attached to them, in which lay a few agricultural implements the worse for wear and soiled with rust, looked fitter to be the abodes of unclean animals than of creatures made in the image of God; and, in point of fact, a number of black pigs shared them with their owners without exhibiting the

least disgust, a proof of a lack of delicacy in these domestic wild boars.

In front of the doors stood a few pot-bellied, thin-limbed, feverish-looking children, wearing shirts too short in front or behind, or even a mere waist-band laced with string, their condition of nudity embarrassing them as little, apparently, as though they had been inhabiting the Garden of Eden. Their eyes, ablaze with curiosity, shone through their bushy, unkempt locks like the eyes of night-birds through foliage. Fear and desire contended with each other in the expression on their faces; they felt like running behind a hedge to hide, but they were fascinated and compelled to remain where they were by the sight of the chariot and its occupants.

Somewhat farther back, on the threshold of her cabin, a thin woman, with wan complexion and sunken eyes, cradled in her arms a starving babe, that kneaded with its little hand, already tanned, a bosom whence milk had ceased to flow, and the somewhat whiter tint of which indicated that the poor wretch, degraded by poverty, was still quite a young woman. She looked at the players with a dull, brutish stare, seemingly incapable of realising what it was she beheld. Crouching by the side of her daughter, the grandmother, more bent and

wrinkled than Hecuba, the spouse of Priam, King of Ilion, was dreaming away, her chin between her knees and her hands clasped round her legs, in the attitude of some ancient Egyptian idol. The prominent knuckles, the network of salient veins, and the muscles, tautened like the strings of a guitar, made these poor hands of hers resemble an anatomical preparation forgotten in bygone times in a cupboard by a careless surgeon. Her arms were mere sticks on which hung parchment-like skin, with, at the joints, transverse wrinkles like cuts made by a chopper. On her chin bristled long tufts of hair; a gray moss filled her ears; her eyebrows, like wall-plants in front of a grotto, hung before the cavernous orbits in which slumbered eyes half veiled by the flabby pellicules of the lids. As for her mouth, it had been swallowed up by the gums, and its place was marked only by a star of concentric wrinkles.

On beholding this ancient scarecrow, the Pedant, who was walking, exclaimed: —

"Oh, what a horrible, disastrous, and damnable old witch! By comparison with her the Fates are spruce and comely; she is so sunk in senility, obsolescence, and mildew that no fountain of youth could renew hers. She must be the very Mother of Eternity in person.

When she was born, if ever she came thus into the world, — for her nativity must have preceded creation, — Time was already white-bearded. Would that Master Alcofribas Nasier had beheld her ere he drew the picture of his Sybil of Panzoust or his beldame fanned by a lion with a fox's tail! Then would he have known how many wrinkles, crevices, furrows, ditches, and counterscarps a human ruin can contain, and given us a masterly description of them. No doubt this hag was beautiful in her youth, for it is the prettiest maidens who turn into the most repulsive of old women. Take the hint, young ladies," continued Blazius, turning to the Isabella and the Serafina who had drawn near to listen to him. "When I reflect that a mere three-score years falling upon your springtime bloom would turn you into as hideous, abominable, and appalling old horrors as this mummy broken forth from its case, I really feel grieved to the heart, and it makes me love my own ugly mug the more, since it can in no wise be thus transmuted into a tragical larva, its ugliness, on the contrary, being comically improved by the lapse of years."

Young women do not like being shown themselves, even in the most distant future, becoming old and

ugly, which is one and the same thing, so the two actresses turned their backs on the Pedant with a disdainful little shrug of the shoulders, like women used to such impertinence from him. Approaching the chariot, from which the trunks were being unloaded, they appeared to give themselves over to the duty of seeing that their property was not harmed; the truth is they could find nothing to reply to the Pedant, for Blazius, by himself making fun of his own lack of comeliness, had destroyed all chance of a retort. This was a trick he often made use of in order to make others smart without being made to suffer himself.

The dwelling in front of which the oxen had stopped, with the instinct of animals that never forget a place where they have found both food and litter, was one of the largest in the place. It stood with a certain air of assurance upon the side of the road, from which the other cabins withdrew, ashamed of their uncared-for condition, and concealing their nudity behind a clump or two of bushes, like unfortunate, ungainly girls surprised while bathing. Conscious of being the finest house in the place, the inn seemed to court attention, and its sign stuck out across the road as though to stop travellers on foot or on horseback.

This sign, projected beyond the façade by means of a sort of iron gallows which, at a pinch, could have served for the hanging of a man, consisted of a rusty plate of sheet-iron that creaked upon its bar whenever any breeze blew. A chance dauber had painted upon it the orb of day, not with its golden face and locks, but with a blue disk and blue rays, after the fashion of the sun shadows, with which coats of arms are occasionally diapered. Why had "The Blue Sun" been chosen as the ensign of this hostelry? There are so many Golden Suns on the high-roads that one ceases to distinguish one from another, and, besides, a slight eccentricity is not undesirable in an inn sign. Yet, plausible as it looks, that was not the real motive; the painter who had worked up the image had blue only left, and he would have had to make a trip to some large town in order to procure other colours. He therefore proclaimed the superiority of blue over all other colours and used this celestial shade to paint blue lions, blue horses, and blue cocks upon the signs of the various inns, — a performance that would have won him praise in China, where the more unlike nature a painting is, the more it is praised.

The Inn of the Blue Sun was roofed with tiles,

some brown, some of a red-gold shade that betokened recent repairs, and furnished a guarantee that the rooms were rain-proof at least. The façade towards the road was rough-cast with lime, so that the cracks in the wall and the deterioration of the front were concealed, and the building acquired a certain air of cleanliness. The joists of the timber-work, arranged in the form of saltire crosses and of lozenges, were set off by a coat of red paint after the Basque fashion. It had been deemed unnecessary to indulge in such luxury upon the other sides, and the earthy tones of the clay showed out crude and plain. Less rough or not so poor as the other inhabitants of the hamlet, the owner of the inn had conceded something to the refinements of civilisation: the sashes of the best room were glazed, a rare thing at that time and in that part of the country; the other sashes were filled in with canvas or oiled paper, stretched on frames, or were closed by shutters painted the same *sang-de-bœuf* red as the timbering on the façade.

A shed attached to the house provided sufficient shelter for the vehicles and the animals. Quantities of hay projected through the bars of the racks as through the teeth of a huge comb, while long troughs,

hollowed out of old pine logs mounted on four legs, held the least fetid water obtainable from the near-by pools.

Master Chirriguirri was therefore justified in claiming that there was not another inn within thirty miles with such commodious buildings, so well stocked with provender and victuals, so full of blazing fires, so rich in soft and comfortable beds, so handsomely equipped with linen and table and kitchen ware as the hostelry of the Blue Sun; wherein he deceived neither himself nor any one else, the nearest inn being at least two days' travel distant.

In spite of himself Baron de Sigognac was somewhat ashamed at finding himself in the company of the strolling players, and hesitated to cross the threshold, for Blazius, the Tyrant, the Hector, and the Leander, desiring to do him honour, were holding back to allow him to pass, when the Isabella, divining the Baron's natural shyness, advanced towards him with a little resolute and pouting air.

"You ought to be ashamed, Baron, to be colder and more reserved towards ladies than even Joseph or Hippolytus. Will you not offer me your arm to enter the inn?"

Sigognac bowed and hastened to hold out his hand to Isabella; she rested the tips of her delicate fingers upon the Baron's well-worn sleeve in such a way as to make her light touch equivalent to an encouragement. Thus supported, he regained his courage, and entered the inn with a look of glory and triumph, little caring whether the whole world saw him, for in the gentle realm of France the man who escorts a pretty woman can never be ridiculous and excites envy only.

Chirriguirri advanced to meet his guests and placed his house at their disposal with a grandiloquence that told of the nearness of Spain. A leather jacket, like those worn by Maregates, fastened round the waist by a belt with a brass buckle, set off his athletic torso, but the end of his apron, tucked up at the corner, and a big knife in a wooden sheath, modified his somewhat grim aspect and tempered the ex-smuggler with a reassuring touch of the cook, just as his kindly smile counteracted the unpleasant effect of a deep cicatrice that, starting from the centre of the forehead, disappeared under the close-cropped hair. This cicatrice, which forcibly obtruded itself as Chirriguirri bowed, cap in hand, was marked by a purplish colour and a depression of the flesh that had failed to fill up completely

the repulsive hiatus. A man had to be solidly built for his soul not to escape through such a cut, and Chirriguirri was indeed a stout fellow, whose soul, besides, was probably in no hurry to find out for itself what its fate in the next world was to be. Fussy and timorous travellers would no doubt have considered that the trade of innkeeper was uncommonly peaceable for a landlord with such a mien, but, as I have said, the Blue Sun was the only hostelry in that desert.

The room into which Sigognac and the players entered was far from being as splendid as Chirriguirri had depicted it. The flooring was merely beaten earth, and in the centre a sort of platform, made of big stones, answered for a hearth. An opening cut in the ceiling, and crossed by an iron bar from which hung a chain that hooked on to the pot-hanger, took the place of the grate and the flue, so that the whole upper part of the room was partially shrouded in a cloud of smoke that travelled slowly out of the opening when it was not driven downwards by the winds. The smoke had covered the rafters with a glaze of bitumen like that seen on old pictures, which contrasted with the fresh lime-wash on the walls.

Round three sides only of the hearth, — in order to allow the cook free access to the pots and pans, — wooden settles were set as steadily as possible upon the uneven floor that resembled the skin of a monstrous orange, and were chocked up with bits of broken pots or pieces of bricks. Here and there were a few stools formed of a seat stuck on three legs, one of which passed through and upheld a cross-board that might be used by way of a back by people careless of comfort, but which a sybarite would assuredly have considered an instrument of torture. A sort of hutch, set in a corner, completed the furniture, in which the roughness of the work was matched only by the coarseness of the materials. Splinters of pine, stuck in iron holders, cast over the place a red, smoky light, the sooty spirals mingling, when they reached a certain height, with the clouds sent up from the hearth. Two or three stewpans, hung along the wall like bucklers on the topsides of a trireme, — if this comparison be not too noble and heroic in this connection, — were faintly lighted up by this illumination and gleamed with bloody glister in the shadows. From the ceiling hung sinister at the end of an iron hook a long flitch of bacon that, seen in the smoke ascending from the hearth,

looked alarmingly like the body of a man that had been hanged.

No matter what the host might claim, the place was gloomy indeed, and a solitary traveller might very well, without being in the least a coward, be troubled with unpleasant fancies, and dread finding on the bill of fare a pasty of human flesh provided at the expense of a lonely voyager. The company of players, however, was too numerous for terrifying reflections of this nature to occur to the worthy actors, whose wandering life, besides, had inured them to the strangest of lodgings.

When the players entered the room, there was dozing, at the end of one of the settles, a small girl of eight or nine years of age; at least she looked no older, being uncommonly thin and puny. Her shoulders rested against the back of the bench; she had let fall upon her breast her head, from which hung long tangled locks of hair that prevented her features from being made out; the muscles of her neck, as slender as that of a plucked fowl, were drawn and appeared to have some difficulty in preventing the mass of hair from falling to the ground. Her arms hung limp down her sides, her hands were open, and her legs, too short to reach

the ground, were hanging with one foot crossed over the other. Those legs of hers, as slender as spindles, had been turned a brick-red by the cold, the sun, and the weather, while abundant scratches, some recent, others healed, spoke of habitual rambles through copse and bush. Her feet, small and delicately shaped, were shod with gray dust only, probably the sole kind of covering they had ever known.

As for her dress, it was of the simplest, consisting of two garments: the one, a chemise of linen coarser than any sail-cloth, the other, a loose gown of yellow fustian, in Aragonese fashion, that had been cut out of the least worn part of her mother's skirt. The varicoloured embroidered bird that usually embellishes these skirts, had formed part of the breadth used in the making of the little girl's gown, no doubt because the threads of the wool had strengthened to a certain extent the much-worn stuff. The bird produced, in view of the way it was placed, the most remarkable effect, for the bill was on the waist and the claws on the edge of the lower seam, while the body, rumpled and disarranged by the folds, assumed the queerest positions and looked like one of the chimerical fowls in mediæval natural history books or in old Byzantine mosaics.

The Isabella, the Serafina, and the maid seated themselves on the bench, yet their united weights, joined to that of the by no means heavy little girl, scarcely sufficed to balance that of the duenna, who was seated at the other end. The men found places on the other settles, deferentially leaving an empty space between themselves and Baron de Sigognac.

A few handfuls of brushwood had revived the fire, and the crackling of the dry branches imparted a sense of comfort to the travellers, who were somewhat stiff after the fatigues of the day, and who, though they were unaware of the fact, were feeling the influence of the malaria prevalent in a district full of stagnant waters which the clayey soil refused to absorb.

Chirriguirri approached them courteously and with as much sweetness of aspect as he could impart to his naturally grim countenance.

"What shall I serve to your lordships? My house is stocked with everything suitable for the gentry, though it is a great pity that you did not arrive yesterday, I must say. I had prepared a boar's head with pistachios that smelt so delightfully, that was so admirably spiced and so delicate to the taste that unfortunately there is not so much left as would fill a tooth."

"Most sad indeed," said the Pedant, licking his chops with relish at the imaginary feast. "I prefer a boar's head with pistachios to all other delicacies, and I should willingly have made myself ill by eating overmuch of it."

"And what would you have said of the venison pasty which the noblemen whom I entertained this morning devoured to the last crust, after having sacked the interior without giving the least quarter?"

"I should have said it was excellent, Master Chirriguirri, and I should have duly praised the cook's incomparable merit. But of what avail is it to cruelly excite our appetites by the account of fallacious dishes that have been digested by this time, for I am sure you spared neither pepper, pimento, nutmeg, nor other thirst-exciters. Instead of these dead-and-gone dishes, the merit of which is beyond question, but which can in no wise sustain us, tell us what you have on your bill of fare for the day, for the aorist is most unwelcome in matters culinary and hunger at table loves the present indicative. Away with the past! It stands for despair and fasting; the future, at least, allows the stomach to indulge in pleasant anticipations. For pity's sake, cease relating these vanished delicacies

to poor devils who are jaded and hungry as a pack of hounds."

"You are quite right, sir; remembrances are not very substantial," said Chirriguirri, with a gesture of assent, "yet I cannot but keenly regret that I should have allowed myself to run so short of provisions. My pantry was chock-full yesterday, and I was stupid enough to send off to the castle, not more than two hours since, my last six pots of ducks' livers, splendid livers at that, perfectly huge, regular morsels for a king's table."

"What a wedding at Cana and what a Gamacho's feast might be made of all the dishes you no longer have and that have been devoured by more fortunate guests! But you have kept us long enough on tenter-hooks. Come, confess, without further rhetoric, what you have actually got, now that you have told us so beautifully what you do not possess."

"Quite right, sir. Well, I have garbure, ham, and stock-fish," answered the innkeeper, with an effort at a modest blush, like a good housekeeper whose husband has unexpectedly brought three or four friends to dinner.

"In that case," shouted as one man the starving

company, "bring on your stock-fish, your ham, and your garbure."

"And such garbure as it is," went on Boniface, recovering his coolness and making his voice ring. "Bread squares fried in the finest goose-dripping, curly-headed cabbage of most ambrosial savour, that Milan itself never equalled, and cooked in lard whiter than the snows that crown Maladetta! A soup, in a word, fit to be served to the gods."

"You make my mouth water, but serve the soup at once, for I am absolutely faint with hunger," roared the Tyrant, with the look of an ogre smelling fresh meat.

"Zagarriga, lay the table quickly in the best room," shouted Chirriguirri to a waiter who was probably imaginary, for, in spite of the urgent intonation of his master, Zagarriga gave no sign of life.

"As for the ham, I trust your lordships will be pleased with it; it may rival the most exquisite Channel and Bayonne hams; it has been pickled with rock-salt, and with its streaks of pink and white is the most appetising morsel you ever set eyes upon."

"We are as convinced of the fact as of the truth of the Gospels," said the exasperated Pedant, "but produce instanter that gastronomical wonder, else your inn will

become the scene of acts of cannibalism equalling those that have occurred on shipwrecked galleons and caravels. We have not committed as many crimes as my lord Tantalus that we should be tortured by the sight of vanishing food."

"Right you are, sir," returned Chirriguirri, calmly. "Hallo there, the kitchen brigade! Stir your stumps, hump yourselves, hurry up! These noble travellers are desperately hungry and cannot wait."

But the kitchen brigade remained as unmoved as Zagarriga, for the very good reason that it did not exist and never had existed. The entire staff of the inn consisted of a tall, pale-faced, dishevelled girl called Mionnette, but in Chirriguirri's opinion the imaginary servants whom he constantly summoned gave an air to the inn, made it appear full of people, imparted bustle to it and justified the high prices he charged for the food supplied to travellers. The Boniface of the Blue Sun had so long called the imaginary servants by name that he had ended in believing in their existence, and he was almost surprised that they did not claim their wages, grateful though he was to them for not doing so.

Inferring from the low clatter of dishes in the next room that the table was not yet laid, the innkeeper, in

order to gain time, entered upon a eulogy of the stock-fish, a somewhat unfruitful theme that called for no little eloquence. Fortunately for him, Chirriguirri was accustomed to impart a novel savour to the most insipid dishes by his spicy language.

"I dare say your lordships consider stock-fish a common sort of food, and your lordships are quite right, but there is stock-fish and stock-fish. This cod was caught on the Grand Banks by the boldest fisherman in the Bay of Biscay. It is choice stock-fish, white, savoury, toothsome, excellent when fried in Aix oil, and preferable to salmon, tunny, and sword-fish. Our Holy Father the Pope — may he grant us all indulgences — will have no other in Lent, and he eats it also on Fridays and Saturdays, and such other fast-days as happen along when he is tired of scoter and teal. Peter Lescorbat, from whom I get it, supplies His Holiness also. Papal stock-fish, I can tell you, is not to be despised, and your lordships are not likely to turn your noses up at it, else you would not be good Catholics."

"We are none of us inclined to heresy," returned the Pedant, "and we shall all be delighted to devour Papal stock-fish, but, by Bacchus, let that wonderful fish

be kind enough to leap from the frying-pan into the dish, or we shall melt away like ghosts and phantoms at cock-crow."

"It would not be proper to eat fish before soup; from a culinary point of view it would be putting the cart before the horse," answered Master Chirriguirri, with supreme disdain, "and your lordships are too well bred to indulge in such incongruities. Pray be patient; the garbure must boil just a little longer."

"By the Devil's horns and the Pope's nose," roared the Tyrant, "I should be satisfied with Spartan broth if it were only served up at once."

Baron de Sigognac said nothing and exhibited no impatience. He had eaten the night before. In the long days of starvation spent in his Tower of Hunger he had long since trained himself to hermit-like abstinence, and the frequent recurrence of meals surprised his sober stomach. Neither Isabella nor Serafina complained, for a show of voracity ill beseems young ladies who are supposed to live, like the bees, on dew and the honey of flowers. The Swashbuckler appeared to be delighted, for he had just drawn his belt tighter, and the tongue of the buckle played freely in the hole. The Leander yawned and showed his teeth, and the duenna

had dozed off, three folds of flabby flesh showing under her bent chin.

The little girl that had been asleep at the other end of the settle had awakened and was sitting up. Her face could now be seen, for she had pushed back her hair, the colour of which seemed to have come off on her forehead, so dark was it. Under the tan of her face was visible a deep, waxen, mat pallor. The cheeks, with their prominent cheek-bones, were totally devoid of colour, and the blue, chapped lips were parted by a sickly smile that showed pearly white teeth. Life seemed to have concentrated itself in her eyes, which the thinness of her face caused to appear of extraordinary size, while the halo of broad dark circles around them imparted to them a strange and feverish brilliancy. The white of the eyes was almost blue, so strongly did it contrast with the deep brown of the pupils, and so thick and long were the eyelashes. At this moment those peculiar eyes were filled with an expression of childish admiration and ferocious covetousness, and were fixed unchangingly upon the jewels worn by the Isabella and the Serafina, though the little savage probably was not aware of their little worth. The flash of the imitation gold braid, the deceitful glister of a

necklace of Venetian pearls, dazzled her and threw her into a kind of ecstasy. Plainly, she had never seen anything so beautiful in her whole life; her nostrils worked, her cheeks flushed, and a sardonic smile, interrupted from time to time by a sharp, rapid, and feverish chattering of the teeth, played upon her pale lips.

Fortunately none of the company paid any attention to the poor little bundle of rags agitated by nervous shivers; had they done so, they would have been startled by the fierce and sinister expression of the child's livid features.

Unable to control her curiosity, she put her brown delicate, cold hand, exactly like a monkey's paw, out towards Isabella's dress, and her fingers felt the stuff with marked pleasure and a sensation of voluptuous excitement. The rumpled velvet, shining on every seam, seemed to her the newest, richest, and softest stuff in the world.

Light as the touch was, Isabella turned round, noted the child's act, and smiled in motherly fashion upon her. Feeling herself looked at, the girl suddenly resumed an expression of childish stupidity, indicative only of idiotic lack of sense, and this with a skilled mimicry that would

have done honour to an actress, an expert in her art. Then in a sing-song voice she said : —

"It is like the cope of Our Lady on the altar."

After which she lowered her eyelashes, that reached to her cheek-bones, leaned back on the seat, clasped her hands together, and feigned to drop asleep as though overcome by fatigue.

Mionnette, the tall, pale girl, entered with the news that supper was ready, and the company passed into the next room.

The players did their best to do honour to the bill of fare, though it did not contain the promised delights, and satisfied their hunger, and especially their thirst, by repeated draughts from the wine-skin, almost flabby, like a bagpipe from which the wind has been exhausted.

They were just about to rise from table, when the barking of dogs and the sound of horses' hoofs was heard in the vicinity of the inn. Three knocks struck on the door with impatience and authority betokened the arrival of a traveller who was not used to be kept waiting. Mionnette sprang to the door, lifted the latch, and there entered a cavalier, who almost drove the door in her face, and who was preceded by a riot of dogs that nearly upset the maid and scattered through the

room, leaping and jumping, hunting for bones and scraps on the plates that had been removed, and accomplishing in one minute with their tongues the work of three dish-washers.

A few smart cuts of the whip, administered to the innocent and the guilty alike, calmed the tumult as by enchantment. The dogs, panting and their tongues lolling, took refuge under the settles, laid their heads between their paws or curled themselves up, while the horseman, clanking his spurs, entered the room where the players were eating with the assurance of one who feels at home wherever he may happen to be. Chirriguirri followed him, cap in hand, and, though not at all timid, with an obsequious and almost frightened look.

The gentleman, standing on the threshold, touched the brim of his beaver, and quietly glanced at the company of actors who were returning his salute. He looked to be about thirty or thirty-five years of age; his flushed, jovial face, the rosy tones of which had been turned a deeper red by the open air and exercise, was framed in by golden curly hair. His prominent eyes were blue and somewhat hard; his nose, slightly turned up, ended in a sharply cut facet; a pair of small reddish mustaches, waxed at the ends and curled up, twirled

under his nose like commas, and the symmetry was completed by a tuft in the form of an artichoke petal. Between the mustaches and the tuft opened a mouth the upper lip of which compensated by its thinness for the excess of sensuality in the lower, that was full, broad, red, and marked with perpendicular lines. The chin curved up abruptly and caused the hair of the tuft to stick out. The forehead which the cavalier bared as he threw his beaver upon a stool was white and smooth, being protected from the rays of the sun by the hat, and proved that the nobleman, ere he left the court for the country, must have had a very delicate complexion. On the whole his was an agreeable face, in which the jollity of the boon companion softened the pride of the aristocrat.

His costume was proof that the Marquis, for such was his rank, had not, though he lived in a distant province, severed his connection with the most modish tailors and mercers of the capital. A collar of point-lace set off his neck and fell over a doublet of lemon-yellow cloth embroidered with silver. The doublet was very short and allowed a mass of fine linen to puff out between it and the trunks. The sleeves of the doublet, or of the bodice rather, allowed the shirt to

show up to the elbows. The trunks, adorned with a sort of puffed apron of straw-coloured ribbon, fell to a little below the knee, where they were met by soft leather boots armed with silver spurs. A blue cloak, trimmed with silver lace, thrown upon one shoulder and held there by a loop, completed a dress that was somewhat too rich for the country and the time of year, but which may be accounted for by the simple fact that the Marquis had just been hunting with the fair Yolande and had dressed himself out in his best with the intention of maintaining his former reputation as a dandy, for at the Cours-la-Reine he had won admiration among the bloods and the exquisites.

"Soup for my dogs, a measure of oats for my horse, bread and ham for myself, and a snack of some sort for my man," said the Marquis, in hearty fashion, as he sat down at the foot of the table, close by the maid, who, seeing a handsome nobleman so richly attired, had let fly at him a most alluring glance and a compelling smile.

Chirriguirri placed before the Marquis a pewter plate and a tankard of the same metal; the maid, graceful as Hebe, poured him out a bumper which he drained at a draught. After a few moments devoted

to silently stilling the pangs of a hunter's hunger, the fiercest of all, and equalling in its intensity the *boulimia* of the Greeks, the Marquis let his glance wander round the table, and among the players he noticed, seated by Isabella's side, Baron de Sigognac, whom he knew by sight and whom he had come across that day when the hunt had dashed across in front of the oxen.

Isabella was smiling to the Baron, who was whispering to her, with the sort of faint, languorous smile, the caress of the soul, the mark of sympathy rather than the expression of gaiety, which could not be mistaken by any one who had had much intercourse with women, as was the case with the Marquis. He ceased to wonder at Sigognac's presence in the company of strolling players, and the contempt inspired in him by the poor Baron's dilapidated attire was considerably diminished. The idea of the young gentleman following his love on the car of Thespis through all manner of adventures, whether comic or tragic, struck him as betokening a true lover's imagination and a determined mind. He nodded to Sigognac to let him know he had recognised him and that he fathomed his purpose, but, like the well-bred man he was, he respected his incognito and appeared to devote himself exclusively to

the maid, to whom he was paying exaggerated compliments, half true, half mocking, which she received in similar fashion with bursts of laughter admirably adapted to show in its entirety her splendid set of teeth.

The Marquis, desirous of pushing forward a love affair that seemed to promise success, thought fit all of a sudden to declare himself particularly fond of the drama and a sound judge of acting. He complained that in the provinces one lacked this pleasure so well-fitted to exercise the intellect, to refine the language, to increase politeness and to improve manners; then, addressing himself to the Tyrant, who appeared to be the leader of the company, he asked him whether they had any engagements that would prevent their giving a few performances of the best plays in their repertory in the château of Bruyères, where it would be a simple matter to erect a stage in the great hall or in the orangery.

The Tyrant, smiling in silly fashion in his big hairy beard, replied that nothing was easier, and that his troupe, one of the very best touring in the provinces, was entirely at his lordship's service, from the King down to the maid, added he, with a feigned air of innocence.

"Nothing could be better," answered the Marquis, "and as regards terms there shall be no difficulty; you

shall yourself fix the amount of remuneration, for one should never bargain with Thalia, a Muse greatly in favour with Apollo, and as highly considered at Court as in the city and the provinces, seeing that in the latter we are not quite so untutored as it is the fashion in Paris to believe."

With these words the Marquis, after significantly pressing the soubrette's knee with his own, without the young person being in the least offended, rose from table, pulled his beaver down over his eyes, waved a good-bye to the company and went off amid the baying of his pack. He was riding on ahead in order to prepare for the reception of the players at his château.

It was already late, and the start was to be made very early the next morning, for Bruyères was rather far off, and though a barb is quite able to do easily its ten or twelve miles along cross-roads, a heavily laden chariot, drawn by tired oxen along a sandy high-road, takes a good deal more time.

The women retired into a sort of garret in which had been put bundles of straw; the men remained in the room, settling themselves as best they could upon the benches and stools.

IV

SCARECROW HIGHWAYMEN

LET me return now to the little girl I left asleep on the bench, and so soundly that it was plainly simulated. Her attitude rightly strikes me as suspicious, and the fierce covetousness that shone in her wild eyes as she glared upon Isabella's necklace requires that her actions should be watched.

Indeed, as soon as the players had left the room, she carefully opened her dark eyes, looked searchingly into every corner of the room, and when she had made certain that there was no one there, she slipped from the bench to the floor, stood up, threw back her hair by a gesture that was habitual to her, and made for the door, which she opened without more noise than if she had been a phantom. She closed it with infinite precaution, taking care the latch should not fall back too suddenly, then slowly walked off to the corner of a hedge, round which she disappeared.

Feeling sure then that she could no longer be seen from the house, she started on a run, leaping across the ditches full of stagnant water, striding across the fallen pines, and bounding over the moor like a doe pursued by a pack of hounds. Her long hair lashed her face like black serpents, and sometimes, falling upon her forehead, blinded her. In such cases, without diminishing her speed, she pushed it back behind her ears with the palm of the hand, making a gesture of saucy impatience, though her swift feet needed not the help of sight, so well were they acquainted with the road.

The aspect of the place, so far as it could be made out by the livid light of a clouded moon, was peculiarly desolate and lugubrious. A few pines, looking like spectres of murdered trees, thanks to the cut made in the bark to allow the resin to flow, exhibited their reddish wounds along a sandy road, which showed white even in the darkness of night. Beyond, on either side of the way, stretched the dark purple heath, over which hung banks of grayish vapours to which the beams of the orb of night imparted the air of a line of phantoms, well calculated to strike terror into the minds of superstitious people or of those unaccustomed to the natural phenomena of the region.

The child, no doubt used to these phantasms of the desert, paid no attention to them and kept steadily on her way. She at last reached a sort of hillock, topped with a score or more of pines that formed a kind of wood. With remarkable agility, and without any sign of fatigue, she climbed the fairly steep slope and reached the crest of the mound. Standing there, she cast her eyes, apparently capable of piercing the darkness, around her for some time, and seeing nothing but empty space, she put two fingers in her mouth and whistled three times in a way that a traveller, traversing the woods at night, never hears without a secret shudder, even though he believes it is the cry of timid owls or other inoffensive creatures.

She paused between each whistle, else her call might have been mistaken for the hooting of the orfrays, the honey-buzzards, and the owls, so perfect was the imitation. Soon a heap of leaves stirred, swelled up, shook itself like an animal awakened out of sleep, and a human form rose slowly before the little lass.

"Is that you, Chiquita?" said the man. "What is the news? I did not expect you, and I was having a sleep."

The man roused by Chiquita's call was a lusty fellow of twenty-five or thirty years of age, of medium stature, thin, muscular, and fit, to all appearance, for stratagems and spoils of all sorts. He could turn smuggler of goods or salt, poacher, thief, and cut-throat, following one or the other of these honest pursuits, or all together, as occasion called for them.

In the moonbeam that fell upon him from a rift in the clouds, like the rays of a dark lantern, he stood out clear against the dark background of the pines, and it would have been possible, had any one been there, to examine his mien and his dress, both characteristically truculent. His face, of a coppery tan like that of a native of the Caribbees, brought out by contrast his brilliant hawk's eyes, and his particularly white teeth, the very sharp canines being exactly like a young wolf's fangs. A handkerchief was bound round his brow like a bandage upon a wound, and held in his thick, curly, rebellious hair, that stuck up like a crest upon the top of his head; a blue vest faded by long use, and adorned with buttons made of coins soldered to a metal stalk, clothed his torso; canvas breeches hung loosely on his thighs and the fastenings of his alpargatas criss-crossed round his legs that were as clean and muscular as a

deer's. His costume was completed by a broad red woollen sash that came up to his armpits from the hips, and that was twisted several times round his waist. A protuberance in front indicated that it served the rascal as pantry and treasury, and if he had turned round there would have been seen, projecting above and below the sash on his back, a long Valencia navaja, one of the fish-shaped knives, the blade of which is fastened by twisting a copper ring, and that bears on its steel as many red scores as the owner of the weapon has murdered men. I do not know how many of these scarlet grooves adorned Agostino's navaja, but judging from the fellow's looks it might well be supposed that they were numerous. Such was the individual with whom Chiquita maintained secret relations.

"Well, Chiquita," said Agostino, stroking in friendly way the child's head with his rough hand, "what have you seen at Chirriguirri's inn?"

"A chariot full of travellers has come," answered the child. "Five big trunks were taken into the shed, and they appeared to be heavy, for it took two men to carry each."

"Huh!" said Agostino, "travellers sometimes

put stones into their trunks in order to win respect from innkeepers. That sort of thing is not unknown."

"But," retorted Chiquita, "the three young ladies in the party have gold-braided dresses. One of them, the prettiest, wears round her neck a string of big silvery beads that shine in the light, and that are, oh! so lovely, so beautiful!"

"Pearls those are; that's good," muttered the bandit. "Provided they are not imitation. The Murano people are uncommonly clever, and gallants nowadays are so lax in their morals."

"Dear Agostino," went on Chiquita, in pleading tones, "if you cut the pretty lady's throat, you will give me the necklace, will you not?"

"It would become you wonderfully, would n't it? Harmonise with your tousled head, your dust-cloth chemise, and your canary-coloured skirt."

"I have kept watch so often for you, I have run so often to warn you even when the mists were rising from the ground and the dew wetted my poor bare feet. Have I ever kept you waiting for food in your hiding-places, even when I was shivering with fever and my teeth chattered like the beak of a stork on the edge of a

swamp, and when I could scarcely drag myself through the thickets and the underbrush ? "

" Yes, indeed," replied the brigand, " you are a brave and faithful girl, but we have not got the necklace yet. How many men did you count ? "

" Oh, a lot of them ! One stout and strong with a big beard on his face, an old one, two thin ones, one that looks like a fox and another who looks like a gentleman, though he has very mean clothes."

" Six men," said Agostino, thoughtfully, as he reckoned on his fingers. " Alas ! I should not have feared that number in the old days, but I am the only one left of my company. Are they armed, Chiquita ? "

" The nobleman has his sword and the tall thin fellow has a rapier."

" No pistols ? No arquebuse ? "

" Not that I saw," answered Chiquita, " unless they were left in the chariot, but in that case Chirriguirri or Mionnette would have let me know by a sign."

" Well, we shall risk making the attempt and prepare an ambuscade," said Agostino, making up his mind. " Five trunks, gold lace, and a pearl necklace ; I have gone to work for less."

The brigand and the little girl entered the wood, and

having reached its deepest part, they busied themselves moving stones and armfuls of brushwood, and ere long laid bare five or six planks covered with earth. Agostino raised the boards, threw them to one side, and descended into the black, gaping opening up to his waist. Was it the entrance to the subterranean way or a cavern, the customary retreat of the brigand? Was it his hiding-place for stolen goods? Or the ossuary where he interred the bodies of his victims? The latter supposition would have seemed the most probable to a spectator, had there been any other there than the owls perched in the pine-trees.

Agostino bent down and seemed to be looking for something at the bottom of the hole; then he drew himself up, holding in his arms a human form, stiff as a dead body, which he unceremoniously cast upon the edge of the excavation. Chiquita betrayed not the least fear of the thing thus strangely exhumed, and drew the body by the feet to some little distance from the grave, exhibiting an amount of strength that no one would have supposed she possessed, judging by her slight frame. Agostino, pursuing his dreadful work, drew from this Aceldama five more bodies, which the girl placed by the side of the first, smiling the while

like a young ghoul preparing to feast in a graveyard. The open grave, the bandit dragging from their rest the remains of his victims, the little maid helping at the ghastly job, formed, under the dark shadows of the pines, a sight well fitted to terrify the bravest of men.

The bandit picked up one of the bodies, carried it to the crest of the scarp, stuck it upright and kept it in that position by driving into the ground the pole to which it was lashed. Thus upheld, the dead body looked, in the darkness, fairly like a living man.

"Alas! to what am I reduced by misfortune and evil days," said Agostino, with a deep groan. "Instead of a company of stout fellows, handling knife and arquebuse like picked soldiers, I have left only mannikins covered with rags, scarecrows for travellers, mere dumb supernumeraries in my solitary exploits. This one was Mataserpies, the valiant Spaniard, my bosom friend, a delightful fellow who scored crosses on the faces of the chuckle-heads as cleanly with his navaja as with a brush dipped in red. A well-born gentleman, to boot, and as proud as if he had sprung from the loins of Jove himself, offering his arm to the ladies to assist them to get down from their coach, and turning out

the pockets of common folk in truly grand and regal fashion. There are his cloak, his collar, and his sombrero with the flame-coloured feather which I piously stole from the executioner for relics, and with which I have dressed this straw man that has taken the place of my young hero, worthy of a better fate. Poor Mataserpies, how it did annoy him to be hanged; not that he cared a rap about death itself, but as a nobleman he claimed it was his right to have his head cut off. Unfortunately he had not his genealogy in his pocket and had perforce to die upright."

Returning to the excavation, Agostino picked up another mannikin wearing a blue cap: —

"And this one was Isquibaival, a wonder, a valiant man, with his heart in his work; he suffered from excess of zeal at times and allowed himself to massacre every one. It is a mistake to kill off customers, by Jove! But for the rest, not greedy of the spoils and always satisfied with his share. He despised gold and cared for blood only, the fine fellow. And how bravely he bore himself under the blows dealt him by the executioner when he was broken on the wheel in the main square at Orthez! Neither Regulus nor Saint Bartholomew bore up better under their sufferings. He was

your father, Chiquita. Honour his memory and say a prayer for the repose of his soul."

The little girl crossed herself and her lips moved as if she were repeating sacred words.

The third scarecrow wore a morion and rattled as Agostino lifted it up. An iron cuirass showed dull upon his ragged buff jerkin, and targes rattled upon his thighs. The bandit furbished up the armour on the arms in order to make it shine.

"A flash of metal in the shadows occasionally inspires a salutary terror. People think they have to do with men-at-arms on a vacation. He was an old trooper, he was: doing his job on the high-road as on the field of battle, coolly, methodically, obediently. He was taken from me by a pistol-shot in the face; an irreparable loss! But I shall avenge him."

The fourth phantom, draped in a ragged cloak, was, like the others, honoured with a funeral eulogy. He had died under torture, being too modest to own to his great deeds and having refused with heroic constancy to reveal the name of his accomplices to over-inquisitive judges.

The fifth, representing Florizel of Bordeaux, obtained no post-mortem discourse from Agostino, but merely

an expression of regret tempered by hope. Florizel, the deftest cloak-snatcher in the province, was not, like the others, less lucky than himself, swinging in chains from a gibbet, washed by the rain and eaten of the crows; he was travelling in the King's galleys on the Oceanic and Mediterranean seas. He was merely a cut-purse among brigands, a fox in a company of wolves, but he was apt, and, with the training to be gained in the school of the galleys, he might make his mark: a man does not attain perfection all at once. Agostino was impatiently awaiting the moment when this dear chap would escape from the bagno and return to him.

Stout and short, dressed in a smock-frock drawn in at the waist with a belt, and wearing a broad-brimmed hat, a sixth mannikin was planted somewhat in front of the others as if in command of the squad.

"You deserve the place of honour," said Agostino to the figure, "you patriarch of the high-road, Nestor of cloak-snatchers, Ulysses of burglars, O great Lavidalotte, my guide and my teacher, who received me into the company of the Knights of the Road and transformed me from a wretched tyro into a practised bandit. You taught me slang, showed me how to

disguise myself in a score of different ways, like the late Proteus when people were hot-foot after him; you trained me to hurl a knife into a knot in a board at thirty paces; to snuff a candle with a pistol-shot; to pass through locks like the wind; to wander invisible about houses, just as if I had carried a dead man's hand about with me; to discover the best-concealed hiding-places without having recourse to a hazel wand. How much good doctrine I did learn from you, O great man! And how plainly you made me perceive, by sound reasoning, that work was meant for fools. Why did envious fate make you starve to death in this cavern, every egress from which was watched, but into which the minions of the law did not dare venture, for no one, brave though he may be, cares to face the lion in its den; even when dying, it is capable of striking down four or five men with paw or teeth. Come, then, you whose unworthy successor I am, command worthily this little company of bogies and scarecrows, these mannikins representing the brave fellows who have gone before, and who, though dead, will still, like the Cid, strike terror into men. Your shades, O glorious bandits, will suffice to strip those jackanapes."

Having finished his work, the bandit took his stand

on the road in order to judge of the effect of the masquerade. The straw brigands looked really quite terrifying and fierce, and a fearful eye might well be misled in the shades of night or in the dawn of morning, at that weird hour, when old willows, with their stumpy branches on the edge of the ditches, look like men armed with cutlasses or shaking their fists.

"Agostino," said Chiquita, "you have forgotten to arm the mannikins."

"True," replied the brigand. "What was I thinking of? Well, the greatest geniuses nod at times; however, the matter can be speedily mended."

Whereupon he fastened to the ends of the inert arms old arquebuse rests, rusty swords, and even mere sticks placed like muskets at the ready. Thus armed, the troop looked formidable enough as it stood along the slope.

"As it is a long journey from the village to the place where they will dine, they will no doubt start at three in the morning, and by the time they have reached our ambush, day will be breaking; the most favourable moment, for we want neither too much light, nor too much darkness for our fellows. Daylight would betray them; darkness would conceal them. Meanwhile, let

us have a nap; the creaking of the ungreased chariot wheels that scares away wolves will awaken us, and as we never sleep but with one eye open, like cats, we shall soon be up."

Having thus spoken, Agostino stretched himself out upon a bundle of heather; Chiquita nestled close to him in order to benefit by the Valencian *capa de muestra* which he had thrown over himself by way of a blanket, and to warm her poor little limbs shivering with fever. Soon the warmth cradled her, her teeth ceased chattering, and she went off into dreamland. I am bound to own that her dreams were not filled with handsome rosy cherubs wearing cravats of white wings and fluttering about, or with lambs duly washed and soaped and adorned with favours, or with caramel palaces with colonnades of angelica; on the contrary, Chiquita beheld in her visions Isabella's head cut off, the pearl necklace between its teeth, and endeavouring, by irregular and precipitate leaps, to escape the child's outstretched hands. Chiquita was greatly agitated by this dream, and Agostino, half awakened by her kicking, grunted as he snored:

"If you do not keep quiet, I'll kick you down to the foot of the slope, where you may squirm round with the frogs."

Chiquita, who was aware that Agostino was a man of his word, took the hint and remained quite still. Soon the sound of their regular breathing alone told of the presence of human beings in that lonely place.

The brigand and his tiny accomplice were drinking deep from the black cup of sleep, in the midst of the moor, when at the Inn of the Blue Sun, the ox-driver, striking his goad on the ground, warned the players that it was time to set out.

They settled down as best they could in the chariot on the trunks that formed all sorts of corners, and the Tyrant compared himself to Polyphemus, lying on a mountain-top, which did not prevent his very soon snoring like an organ pipe. The women had smuggled themselves away at the back, under the canvas top, where the folded scene-drops formed a sort of mattress relatively soft. In spite of the horrible creaking of the wheels that sobbed, miauled, hiccupped, groaned, everybody soon sank into fitful slumber, filled with incoherent and fantastic dreams in which the noises made by the chariot were transformed into howls of wild beasts or cries of murdered children.

Sigognac, disturbed by the novelty of the adventure and the bustle of this Bohemian life, so different from

the cloistered quiet of his ancestral manor, was walking by the side of the vehicle. He was thinking of the adorable grace of Isabella, whose beauty and modesty spoke more of the high-born lady than of the wandering player, and he was wondering how he could ever manage to make her love him, utterly unconscious of the fact that she already did so, and that the dear girl, touched to the very depths of her being, was only waiting for him to ask for her heart to give it to him. The timid Baron was arranging in his mind innumerable terrible and romantic incidents and proofs of devotion such as are to be met with in books of chivalry, in order to pave the way for the tremendous confession at the very thought of which his heart failed him. Yet that confession, which cost him so much, had already been made in the plainest fashion by the fire of his glance, the trembling of his voice, the sound of his ill-repressed sighs, the somewhat awkward attentions he paid to Isabella, and the absent-minded replies he made to the players. Nor, although he had breathed no word of love to the young lady herself, had she failed to understand him.

The day was just breaking; a narrow strip of faint light was stretching along the plain, bringing out clearly,

in spite of the distance, the black outlines of the swaying heather and even the blades of grass. A few pools of water, touched by the gleam, shone here and there like the pieces of a broken mirror. Faint sounds made themselves heard, and smoke was arising in the still air, indicating the resumption of human activity in the midst of the wilderness. Against the luminous band, now turning to a rosy tint, showed a quaint figure, resembling at a distance a pair of dividers held in an invisible hand engaged in measuring the moor. It was a shepherd on his stilts, walking spider-like through the swamps and the sand.

This was no new sight for Sigognac, and he paid little attention to it, but though deeply sunk in reverie, he could not help remarking a little shining point that sparkled under the still deep shadow of the clump of pines where I left Agostino and Chiquita. It could not be a glow-worm ; the season when love makes these creatures phosphorescent was many months past. Could it be the eye of a one-eyed night-bird, for there was but one luminous point ? Sigognac was not satisfied with this explanation ; to him it looked more like the sputtering of a lighted linstock.

Meanwhile the chariot kept on its way, and as it

drew nearer the pine clump, Sigognac thought he made out on the crest a row of queer-looking beings placed as if in ambush, their forms dimly visible in the rays of the rising sun. As, however, they remained absolutely motionless, he took them for old stumps of trees, laughed internally at his own suspicion, and forbore awaking the players, as he had at first thought of doing.

The vehicle rolled on a little farther. The shining point on which Sigognac still fixed his glance changed its position; a long stream of fire flashed through a puff of white smoke; a loud explosion was heard, and a ball flattened itself upon the yoke of the oxen, that started violently aside, dragging the chariot with them, but happily stopped on the edge of the ditch by a heap of sand.

The report and the jolt woke up the whole company with a start, and the young women began to scream. The duenna alone, accustomed to adventures, kept quiet and prudently slipped the two or three doubloons she kept in her girdle between her stocking and the sole of her shoe.

Standing at the head of the chariot from which the players were endeavouring to emerge, Agostino, his

Valencian cloak rolled round his arm, his navaja in his hand, shouted in a voice of thunder: —

"Your purses or your lives! Any resistance is useless; at the least sign of it my men will fire upon you!"

While the bandit was thus uttering his highwayman's ultimatum, the Baron, whose stout heart could not brook the insolence of such a rascal, had quietly drawn his sword and dashed upon him. Agostino parried the Baron's lunges with his cloak and was watching for an opportunity to use his navaja upon him. Resting the handle of the weapon against the upper part of his arm and balancing the latter with a sharp motion, he hurled the blade against Sigognac's waist. Lucky was he to be thin; a slight side motion enabled him to avoid the murderous point, and the weapon fell at a distance. Agostino blanched, for he was now disarmed, and he was well aware that his scarecrow troop could be of no possible assistance to him. Nevertheless, trusting to the effect of terror, he called out: "Fire, my lads!" The players, afraid of the musketry, retreated and took refuge behind the chariot in which the women were yelling like jays plucked alive. Sigognac himself, brave as he was, could not help ducking his head.

Chiquita, who had followed the whole affair hidden behind a bush, between the branches of which she looked out, on seeing the perilous position of her friend, crawled like an adder along the dusty road, picked up the knife unnoticed by any one, and, springing up, handed the navaja to the bandit. Proud and savage was the expression that shone on the child's pale face; her dark eyes flashed, her face worked, and her half-open lips revealed two rows of hungry teeth that gleamed like those of a wild beast at bay. Her whole small figure breathed indomitable hatred and revolt.

For the second time Agostino balanced his knife, and Baron de Sigognac might have been stopped at the outset of his adventures but that an iron grip most opportunely caught the bandit's wrist. The hand, that gripped like a vice when the screw is being turned, crushed the muscles, bruised the bones, swelled the veins, and drove the blood under the nails. In vain did Agostino endeavour to free himself by the most desperate efforts; he dared not turn round, for the Baron would have pinked him in the back, and he was still parrying his thrusts with his left arm, though he felt that his captive hand would be torn from his arm with the muscles if he persisted in trying to free it. The

pain became so acute that his numbed fingers opened and let fall the weapon.

It was the Tyrant, who, coming up behind Agostino, had done Sigognac this yeoman service. Suddenly he called out: —

"The devil! Is that an adder biting me? I felt two sharp fangs strike into my leg."

Chiquita it was who was biting his calf like a dog to compel him to turn round, but the Tyrant, without letting go of Agostino, shook off the little girl and sent her flying ten yards off on the road. The Hector, bending his long grasshopper-like limbs, bent down, picked up the knife, shut it, and slipped it into his pocket.

In the mean time the sun was slowly rising above the horizon; a portion of its ruddy disk was showing above the level of the moor, and in the clear light the mannikins were losing more and more their look of human beings.

"Look here," said the Pedant, "it strikes me that the arquebuses of these gentry have been hanging fire on account of the night-damp. However it may be, they are not very brave, for they are leaving their leader in the lurch and standing as still as stocks."

"And for a very good reason," replied the Hector, as he scaled the bank; "they are straw figures dressed in rags, armed with old iron, and admirably adapted to scare away birds from cherry-trees and vineyards."

With six successive kicks he sent the six grotesque figures flying into the middle of the road, where they flattened out with the irresistibly comical gestures of marionettes the strings of which have been let go. Dislocated and spread out, the mannikins were a parody, at once buffoon and sinister, of dead bodies left lying on a battlefield.

"You may alight, ladies," said the Baron to the actresses; "there is nothing to be afraid of; it was only a painted peril."

Grieved at the failure of a trick that usually succeeded, so great is the cowardice of people and so much does fear distort objects, Agostino hung his head with a piteous look. Near him stood Chiquita, frightened, haggard, and angry, like a night-bird surprised by the daylight. The bandit dreaded lest the players, who were numerous, should take it on themselves to punish him or else to hand him over to the officers of the law, but the joke of the mannikins had excited their laughter and they were roaring over it in right good

fashion. Now laughter does not incline to severity; it distinguishes man from the animal creation, and according to Homer is the appanage of the immortal and blessed gods who olympically laugh their fill during the leisure hours of eternity.

So the Tyrant, of a kindly disposition at all times, relaxed his grip, and while still keeping good hold of the bandit, said to him in his big tragedy voice, the inflections of which he at times used in familiar speech: —

"You rascal, you frightened these ladies, and deserve therefore to be hanged with short shift, but if, as I fancy, they are inclined to pardon you, for they are merciful souls, I shall not take you to the sheriff. The trade of purveyor to the gibbet is not to my taste, and besides your stratagem was quite picaresque and amusing. It is a very good trick for getting coin out of your coward merchants. I appreciate it, being myself an actor conversant with tricks and subterfuges, and your inventiveness induces me to be indulgent to you. You are not a mere dull, low thief, and it would be a pity to cut short so fine a career."

"Alas!" returned Agostino, "I have no choice, and I am more to be pitied than you are aware. All that

is left of my company, once as numerous as your own, is myself; the executioner has deprived me of my leading man, my heavy father, and my general utility man. I must perforce perform my play alone on the stage of the high road, changing my voice and dressing up mannikins in order to make people believe I have a numerous troop at my back. A melancholy fate, I warrant you. Then scarcely a soul ever comes along this way: it has acquired such a bad name, what with its quagmires and its difficulties for foot passengers, horses, and carriages. It comes from nowhere and leads nowhere, but I cannot afford to buy the right to a better one. Every road fairly travelled has its own company. Idlers who work fancy a highwayman's life is all roses; there are plenty of thorns in it. I would like well enough to be an honest man, but what would be the use of presenting myself at city gates with such a truculent mug as mine and so abominably ragged a dress? The dogs would bite me, and the officers collar me, if I had a collar. And now my plan has gone all to smash, a plan that was so well thought out, so well carried out, and that was to provide me with the means of buying a cape for poor little Chiquita. I never have any luck; I must have been born under an

unpropitious star. Yesterday I had to draw my belt tighter by way of dinner. Your most uncalled-for courage takes the bread from my mouth, and since I have failed to rob you, you might at least give me alms."

"There is sense in that," answered the Tyrant. "We have prevented your practising your trade, and we do owe you some compensation. There, drink our healths with these two pistoles."

Isabella drew from the chariot a piece of dress stuff which she presented to Chiquita.

"Oh, it is the necklace of white beads that I would like," said the child, with a look of intense desire.

The actress undid the ornament and fastened it round the little girl's neck. Amazed and delighted, Chiquita silently rolled the white grains between her brown fingers, bending her head and trying to see the necklace upon her poor thin bosom; then she suddenly looked up, threw back her hair, gazed at Isabella with her blazing eyes, and said in a strange, deep tone: —

"You are good; I shall never kill you!"

And leaping the ditch, she ran to a little mound on top of which she sat down to examine her treasure.

Agostino bowed his thanks, picked up his damaged

mannikins, carried them back to the pine grove and buried them again until need for them should arise. Then the chariot, which the ox-driver had abandoned to its fate at the very first shot, leaving the travellers to get out of the mess as best they could, started slowly, the man having returned to his duty. The duenna took the doubloons out of her shoes and quietly returned them to the recesses of her pocket.

"You have behaved like a hero of romance," said Isabella to Sigognac, "and under your protection one travels in safety. How bravely you did charge that bandit, believing him backed by a well-armed troop!"

"The danger was not very great; it was scarcely a skirmish," modestly returned the Baron. "For your sake I would cut giants down to the belt, scatter a whole array of Saracens, fight amid whirlwinds of smoke and flame, orcas, cockatrices, and dragons; I would traverse enchanted forests, and descend into the infernal regions like Æneas and without carrying a golden bough. In the light of your lovely eyes all would be easy for me, for your presence, nay, the mere thought of you, fills me with superhuman strength."

The rhetoric was somewhat exaggerated, it may be, and Asiatically hyperbolical, as Longinus might say,

but it had the merit of sincerity. Isabella did not for one moment doubt but that Sigognac would perform in her honour all those doughty deeds, worthy of Amadis of Gaul, Esplandion and Florimart of Hyrcania. And she was right; it was the most genuine feeling that inspired the Baron, growing every moment more and more in love with her, with such magniloquence. Love can never find words strong enough to express what it wants to say. Serafina, who had heard the young man's words, could not help smiling, for every young woman is prone to consider ridiculous protestations of love addressed to some one not herself, though if these same declarations were to be switched off to her, she would deem them most natural. For one brief instant Serafina thought of trying the effect of her own charms upon Sigognac and luring him away from her friend, but the fancy was a passing one. Though not absolutely selfish, Serafina said to herself that beauty was a gem that should be set in gold. She possessed the gem, but the gold was lacking, and the Baron was so disastrously seedy that he could not possibly furnish the setting or even the casket. So the seasoned coquette kept back the glance she had made ready, saying to herself that that sort of flirtation might be good enough

for an *ingénue*, but not for a leading lady, and therewith she resumed her serene, careless look.

Silence fell upon the company in the chariot, and sleep was beginning to cast its dust in the eyes of the travellers, when the ox-driver said: —

"There is the château of Bruyères!"

V

AT BRUYÈRES CASTLE

THE castle of Bruyères showed to great advantage upon that lovely morning. The Marquis's domains were situated upon the borders of the moor and lay wholly within the arable district, the dying billows of the infertile white sand breaking at the foot of the park walls. An air of prosperity, which presented the strongest contrast with the surrounding waste, struck pleasantly upon the gaze the moment the estate was entered upon; it was like the isle of Macaria in the midst of a desolate sea.

A ha-ha fence, with a handsome stone revetment, enclosed the property without masking the building. In the moat shimmered the emerald checkering of brilliant spring water, the purity of which was unblemished by any aquatic growths and testified to the care taken of it. It was spanned by a bridge of stone and brick, of breadth sufficient to allow of two carriages

driving abreast upon it, and it was protected by a balustraded parapet. At its inner end rose a magnificent gate of wrought iron, a masterpiece of iron-work that might have been fashioned by Vulcan himself. The leaves of the gate were hung upon two quadrangular metal pillars, wrought in open work, simulating an order of architecture, and supporting an architrave above which blossomed a mass of twisted scrolls whence sprang foliage and flowers that curved in with antithetical symmetry. In the centre of this ornamental medley shone the Marquis's coat-of-arms: or, a fesse embattled and counter-embattled gules, with two wild men for supporters. On either side of the gate bristled upon volutes resembling the flourishes of a caligraphist on vellum, sharp-leaved iron spikes, intended to prevent agile marauders from leaping from the bridge past the sides of the gate into the grounds. A few gilded flowers and ornaments mingling discreetly with the severity of the metal, tempered the defensive aspect of the iron-work and caused it to appear merely elegant. It was an almost regal entrance gate, and when a serving-man, wearing the Marquis's livery, had opened it, the oxen dragging the chariot hesitated to enter, as though they were dazzled by its magnificence and ashamed of their

rusticity. They had to be prodded with the goad to compel them to proceed, for the kindly animals were not aware that the plough is the foster-mother of the nobility.

And indeed through such gates ought to have passed only coaches with gilded underbodies, boxes covered with velvet hammer-cloths, windows with panes of Venetian glass or shutters of Cordova leather; but comedy has its own privileges, and the car of Thespis may enter where it pleases.

A sanded drive, as broad as the bridge itself, led to the castle through a garden laid out in the latest fashion. Carefully clipped boxwood borders outlined plots on which, as on a piece of damask, were displayed scrolls of verdure of perfect symmetry. The gardener's shears did not allow one single leaf to protrude above the others; and nature, rebellious though it was, was compelled to become the humble servant of art. In the centre of each of these compartments rose, in a gallant mythological attitude, the statue of a goddess or of a nymph in the Italianised Flemish style. The background of the verdant designs, that could not have been more accurately traced on paper, was formed of sand of various colours.

In the middle of the garden a drive, of the same width as the other, crossed it, not at right angles, but ending in an open space the centre of which was formed by a pond, with rockwork that served for pedestal to a child Triton blowing a jet of liquid crystal out of its shell.

The sides of the garden were bounded by palisaded hedges, clipped close, and the foliage of which exhibited the first golden tints of autumn. The trees, which it was difficult to recognise as trees, had been skilfully shaped into an arcaded portico, through the bays of which distant views and prospects over the surrounding country formed a delight for the eyes.

Along the main drive, drawn up like a double row of servants upon the passage of the guests, grew yews, their sombre evergreen foliage clipped into the shape of pyramids, balls, or firepots, alternating one with another.

This display of splendour excited to the highest pitch the wonder and admiration of the players, for seldom indeed had they been privileged to enter so magnificent a domain. Serafina, as she marked these evidences of wealth, made up her mind to cut out the soubrette and not to allow the Marquis to have a love affair with one

beneath his condition. The finished coquette considered that this Alcander was hers by right, for since when have maids taken precedence of the mistress? Meantime the soubrette, confident in the effect of her charms, unacknowledged by her own sex but unhesitatingly yielded to by men, already considered herself at home, and not without reason. She reflected that the Marquis had singled her out specially, and that his sudden fondness for the drama was the result of the killing glance she had flashed upon him. Isabella, free from any ambitious views, had turned towards Sigognac, who, through shamefacedness, had seated himself behind her in the chariot, and she was endeavouring to dispel the Baron's involuntary melancholy with one of her faint, sweet smiles. She felt that the contrast between the luxurious Castle of Bruyères and the poverty-stricken towers of Sigognac must necessarily produce a painful impression upon the mind of the impoverished nobleman, whom ill-fortune compelled to follow the adventurous life of a chariot-load of strolling actors; so her tender heart sympathised with the grief of the worthy fellow who in every way deserved a better fate.

The Tyrant was turning over in his mind, like marbles in a bag, the number of pistoles he intended to

claim in payment for the services of his company, and with every revolution of the wheels he added another cipher to the amount. Blazius, the Pedant, licking with his Silenus tongue his lips ever parched with a thirst that nothing could slake, was thinking with concupiscence of the hogsheads, puncheons, and quarter casks of wine of the finest brands which must undoubtedly be stored within the cellars of the mansion. The Leander, while readjusting with a small tortoise-shell comb the locks of his somewhat rumpled wig, asked himself with a beating heart whether the fairy manor-house held perchance a mistress fair. A weighty question of a truth; but the Marquis's haughty and domineering port, jovial though his aspect was, tended to moderate the liberties the actor was already permitting himself, in imagination, to take.

Rebuilt during the course of the late reign, the château of Bruyères closed the prospect at the end of the garden, along the almost entire breadth of which it extended. The style of the architecture recalled that of the mansions in the Place Royale in Paris. A main building, with two wings projecting at right angles so as to form a court of honour, made up a well-thought-out design that was majestic without being dull. The

red brick walls, connected at the angles by belting-courses of stone, brought out the windows, also framed in with beautifully dressed white stone, while lintels of the same material marked the separation of the three stories. The keystone of the window-frames represented a chubby-cheeked woman's face, with hair carefully dressed, and smiling with a good-tempered look of welcome. The balcony rails were supported upon swelling balusters. Through the clean, bright panes, lighted up by the rays of the rising sun, was caught a glimpse of long curtains made of rich stuffs.

By way of varying the lines of the main building, the architect, one of Androuet de Cerceau's clever pupils, had built out a sort of portico in a more ornate style than the rest of the building, and had placed in it the entrance door which was reached by a flight of steps. Two pair of coupled pillars, of the rustic order, with courses alternately square and round, such as may be seen in the paintings of Peter Paul Rubens, who was so frequently employed by Queen Mary de Medici, upbore a cornice, ornamented, like the entrance-gate to the park, with the Marquis's escutcheon. This cornice formed the platform of a broad balcony with stone balustrade, upon which opened the principal

window of the great drawing-room. Vermiculated and channelled boss-work adorned the jambs and arch of the doorway, which was closed by two oaken leaves ingeniously carved and varnished, the iron-work of which shone like silver or steel.

The high slate roofs, delicately imbricated and bossed, showed against the clear sky in agreeably correct lines, symmetrically broken by large groups of chimneys, with trophies and other ornaments carved upon each face. Large leaden ornaments, of pleasant fulness, rose upon every gable of the purplish blue roofs on which the sun shone in places. From the chimney-tops, early as the hour was and notwithstanding that the season did not necessarily call for fires, rose little spirals of light smoke, denoting a happy, active, and easy life. The kitchens were already busy in this abbey of Theleme; riding upon robust horses, the keepers were bringing in game for the day's meals; the tenants were coming up with provisions which the kitchen staff was receiving, and footmen were traversing the court bearing orders or on their way to carry them out.

Pleasant indeed to the eye was this castle, the new brick and stone walls of which seemed to have the

colours with which health adorns a healthy countenance. It gave the impression of increasing prosperity in full development, but not of a sudden prosperity, such as capricious Fortune, balanced upon its wheel, enjoys bestowing upon her favourites of a day. Beneath the brand-new luxury one felt there was the wealth of years.

Somewhat behind the mansion, on either side of the wings, rose tall, wide-spreading aged trees, the tops of which were already gilded, though the lower foliage was still of a rich green. These trees grew in the vast, shady, broad, lordly park that stretched afar, bearing witness to the foresight and wealth of the owner's ancestors. For while it is true that with money one can run up buildings quickly, it is also true that no money will hasten the growth of trees, the boughs of which slowly increase like those of the genealogical trees of the homes they cover and protect with their shade.

The worthy Sigognac had certainly never felt the venomous fangs of envy striking into his upright heart, and injecting into it that green poison which speedily finds its way into the veins and, borne with the blood to the end of the smallest ducts, ends by corrupting the

finest of characters; nevertheless he was unable to wholly repress a sigh as he remembered that of yore the Sigognacs took precedence over the Bruyères, as being of older nobility already well known at the time of the first crusade. The clean, new, spruce mansion, as white and rosy as a maiden's cheeks, adorned with every refinement and luxury, seemed to be an unwittingly cruel satire upon the poor, dilapidated, tumble-down, ruinous manor, decaying in silence and forgetfulness, a regular rats' hole, a nest for owls, a home for spiders, that might at any moment crash down upon the head of its unlucky master that had left it at the eleventh hour to avoid being caught in the smash. The many years of weariness and wretchedness that Sigognac had spent in it passed before him in an attitude of deep despair, their hair covered with ashes, wearing dusty liveries, their arms hanging limp, their mouths gaping with the yawn of dulness. Without feeling jealous of the Marquis, he could not help thinking him a very lucky man.

Sigognac was drawn from his moody thoughts by the chariot stopping short in front of the entrance steps. He threw off, as well as he could, his most unseasonable reflections, dried a tear that was gathering in the

corner of his eye, and calmly sprang down to assist Isabella and the other actresses who were bothered by their skirts ballooning up in the morning breeze.

The Marquis de Bruyères, who had observed the approach of the company from afar, was standing at the top of the entrance-steps, dressed in a tan-coloured jacket and breeches, gray silk hose, and white, square-toed shoes; the whole costume trimmed handsomely with ribbons to match. He descended a few steps of the horse-shoe stairs, like a well-bred host who does not lay too much stress upon the quality of his guests, though the presence of Sigognac justified this piece of politeness. He stopped on the third step, considering it would not be dignified to go lower, and thence made a friendly and protecting gesture to the players.

Just then the maid put out from under the hood her roguish, mischievous face, that stood out against the dark background brilliant with light, wit, and ardour; her eyes and her teeth flashed with equal brilliancy, as she leaned half-way out of the chariot, leaning upon the wooden cross-bar, exhibiting a glimpse of her bosom through the parted folds of her neckerchief, and apparently waiting to be helped out. Sigognac, who was busy aiding Isabella, paid no attention to the feigned

embarrassment of the sly minx, who cast upon the Marquis a burning, beseeching glance.

The lord of Bruyères heeded the appeal, descended quickly the last few steps, and approached the vehicle to fulfil his duties of cavalier, his hand outstretched, and his toes turned out like a dancer's. With a swift, coquettish, kittenish motion, the maid sprang to the side of the chariot, hesitated for a second, pretended to lose her balance, threw her arms around the Marquis's neck, and alighted like a bird, scarcely marking the well-raked ground with her little feet.

"Pardon me," she said to the Marquis, affecting a confusion she was far from feeling. "I thought I was going to fall and I clung to your neck as to a branch; when one is falling or drowning, one catches at anything. Besides, a fall is a bad omen for an actress."

"Permit me to look upon this slight accident in the light of a favour," answered the Marquis, much moved at having felt against his breast the skilfully palpitating bosom of the young woman.

Serafina, her head slightly turned, and her pupil well in the outer corner of her eye, had observed the whole scene almost through the back of her head, with the jealous perspicacity of a rival whom nothing escapes, a

power of vision fully equal to Argus's hundred eyes. She could not refrain from biting her lips, Zerbina, such was the soubrette's name, having by a bold and familiar stroke made her way into the good graces of the Marquis, and gaining, so to speak, the honours of the place at the expense of the leading members of the company; a damnable piece of impudence, subversive of proper stage precedence.

"Look at the forward slut, who must have a Marquis to help her down," said Serafina to herself in a style not consonant with the mannered and ultra-refined tone she affected in her speech. But women, when vexed, are very apt to make use of billingsgate, whether they be duchesses or thorough-paced coquettes.

"John," said the Marquis to a valet who had approached at a sign from his master, "have the chariot put up in the stable-yard, and the scenery and properties it contains stored carefully in one of the outhouses. See that the trunks of these ladies and gentlemen are carried to the rooms selected by the majordomo, and let my guests be provided with whatever they may need. I desire that they be treated courteously and respectfully. Off with you!"

Having given these orders, the lord of Bruyères

slowly ascended the steps, not without flashing, ere he disappeared within, a lascivious glance at Zerbina, who smiled back at him in much too alluring a manner, in the opinion of Serafina, wroth at the maid's impudence.

The ox-cart, accompanied by the Tyrant, the Pedant, and Scappino, proceeded into a court at the back, and with the assistance of the stable-men a public square, a palace, and a forest, in the shape of three much-rubbed, long drop-scenes, were speedily drawn from the box of the vehicle, as well as candlesticks of antique form, intended for use at nuptial ceremonies, a gilt wooden cup, a tin dagger, the blade of which slipped back into the handle, skeins of red thread used to represent blood in wounds, a poison vial, an urn for ashes, and other properties indispensable in tragic endings of plays.

A strolling actors' chariot holds a small world, and, indeed, is not the stage a miniature world and the very microcosm philosophers dream of finding? Does it not contain within itself the totality of things and the diverse conditions of man visibly represented by suitable fictions? Are not the old worn-out costumes, covered with dust, stained with oil and tallow, braided with rusty imitation gold lace, the stars of orders of knighthood in rolled gold and Rhinestones, the antique

swords with brass sheaths and blunted iron blades, the helmets and diadems in Greek or Roman shapes, are not these like the cast-off garments of mankind in which the heroes of bygone ages dress themselves up to live again for a moment in the glare of the footlights? These poor treasures, in which the poet is content to dress up his fancies, and that suffice him, with the illusion of the lighting and the prestige of the speech of the gods to enchant the most difficult to please of spectators, would no doubt have been looked at with contempt by a narrow-minded and prosaic person.

The Marquis de Bruyères' servants, true domestics of a great house and as insolent as though themselves aristocrats, reluctantly handled, with an air of disdain, these stage rags they helped to store in the out-house, arranging them as directed by the Tyrant, who was the stage manager of the company. They considered it rather degrading to be set to attend upon strolling players, but the Marquis had spoken, and there was nothing for it but to obey, for he ill brooked rebellion and was as lavish of thrashings as an Eastern potentate.

With as respectful a mien as though he were approaching genuine kings and princesses, the majordomo came, cap in hand, to take the orders of the comedians

and to show them to their respective rooms. The apartments intended for the visitors to Bruyères were situated in the left wing of the mansion. They were reached by beautiful stairs of rubbed white stone, with frequent landings and resting-places, and led into long corridors, floored with black and white slabs in the form of checker-work, lighted by windows at each end. The various rooms opened into these halls, each room being distinguished by the colour of the portière, which was also that of the hangings within, so as to enable the guests to recognise their own chamber easily. There was a Yellow Room, a Red Room, a Green Room, a Blue Room, a Gray Room, a Tapestry Room, a Bohemian leather Room, a Wainscotted Room, a Frescoed Room, and such others as my reader chooses to invent, for the longer enumeration of them would prove fastidious and would come better from a house-decorator than from a writer.

Every one of the rooms was handsomely furnished and provided with luxuries as well as with conveniences. The Tapestry Room, most amorously adorned with voluptuous love scenes drawn from mythology, in the form of rich hangings, was assigned to Zerbina the maid; Isabella was lodged in the Blue Room, the colour

of which was becoming to her fair complexion; the Red had been set apart for Serafina, while the Brown Room was given to the duenna, its sober and almost grim aspect being considered suited to the age of the lady. Sigognac was installed in the Bohemian leather Room, not far from Isabella's, a delicate attention on the part of the Marquis. This fine room was given to important guests only, and the master of Bruyères desired to mark the fact that a man of rank was with the players, and to prove to him that he respected his position as well as his incognito. The other members of the company, the Tyrant, the Pedant, the Hector, Scappino, and Leander were assigned to the remaining chambers.

When Sigognac entered the room allotted to him, and in which his modest travelling equipage had been placed, he mused upon the strangeness of his fortunes and at the same time gazed in surprise upon the apartment he was to occupy during his stay in the castle, for never before had he been so well lodged. The walls, as the name of the room indicated, were hung with Bohemian leather goffered with fanciful flowers and extravagant foliage; the gilded ground brought out the corollas, scrolls, and leaves ornamented with

colours the metallic reflections of which shone like spangles, forming hangings as rich as they were clean, and that covered the walls from the cornice down to the black oak wainscotting admirably divided into panels, lozenges, and compartments.

The window-curtains were of red and yellow brocatelle to match the ground of the hangings and the prevailing colour in the design. The bedstead, the head of which was placed against the wall and the foot of which extended into the apartment, so as to leave space on either side, was upholstered with the same stuff.

Square-backed chairs, with twisted legs, starred with gilt-headed nails and trimmed with fringe, and arm-chairs opening out their well-stuffed arms, were ranged along the wainscotting in the expectation of visitors and marked that close and friendly talk went on in the chimney corner. The mantelpiece, of white Serancolin marble, spotted with red, stood high, broad, and deep. A fire, most pleasant upon that cool morning, was blazing in seasonable fashion, lighting up with its bright reflections the back-plate ornamented with the Marquis's escutcheon. On the shelf, a small clock, in the form of a pavilion the dome of which was formed by the gong, marked the hours upon a dial of inlaid

silver, openworked in the centre and allowing the works within to be seen.

A table, with legs twisted like pillars of the Salomonic order, and covered with a Turkish cloth, occupied the centre of the room. In front of the window stood a dressing-table with a bevelled Venetian mirror upon a guipure cloth covered with the coquettish arsenal of the toilet.

As he gazed in the clear mirror, richly set in a framework of tortoise-shell and pewter, the poor Baron could not help considering himself a most forlorn and pitiable-looking object. The elegance of the room, the newness and freshness of the objects that surrounded him, rendered still more striking the ridiculousness and poverty of a dress that had been old-fashioned even in the days of the late King. Though he was alone, the Baron's thin cheeks mantled with a faint blush; until then his poverty had struck him as regrettable; now it looked grotesque, and for the first time he was ashamed of it. Not a very philosophical state of mind, no doubt, but quite excusable in a young man.

Wishing to attire himself to somewhat better advantage, Sigognac undid the parcel in which Peter had

wrapped up the few habiliments his master owned. He shook out the various vestments it contained, but found nothing to satisfy him. Either the doublet was too short or the trunk-hose was too long; the elbows and the knees, being more exposed to wear, were shiny and threadbare; the seams gaped in many a place, the thread showing prominently; and the poor clothes, discoloured by sun, wind, and rain, had acquired such undecided hues that a painter would have been puzzled to fit names to them. Nor was the linen any better, repeated laundrying having reduced it to a condition of extreme tenuity. The shirts looked like the ghosts of such garments rather than real shirts, and had the air of having been cut out of the cobwebs in Sigognac Castle. To top all, the rats, finding nothing to eat in the pantry, had gnawed some of the least worn-out, and had adorned them with as much openwork as a lace collar, a needless piece of ornamentation the poor Baron would willingly have dispensed with.

Sigognac was so absorbed in his doleful inspection that he failed to hear a very discreet knock at his door which half opened and gave passage first to Master Blazius' rubicund nose, and next to his obese form. As he entered the room he made innumerable exag-

gerated bows, servilely comic or comically servile, denoting respect, half genuine, half feigned.

When the Pedant came up to Sigognac the latter was holding up to the light, by the two sleeves, a shirt traceried like the rose window in a cathedral, and shaking his head with an air of pitiful discouragement.

"By Bacchus!" said the Pedant, whose voice startled the Baron taken unawares, "that is a brave and victorious-looking shirt. One would swear it had been worn by the great god Mars himself on the occasion of the storming of some fortress, so gloriously riddled, perforated, and filled with holes is it by musketry, cross-bow bolts, javelins, cloth-yard shafts, and other ballistic weapons. Do not blush for it, Baron; these holes are mouths that tell of honour won, while the finest and newest linen of Frisia or Holland, pleated in the latest Court fashion, often covers the infamy of some newly enriched, fraudulent, and simoniacal rascal. Many a hero, famous in story, was poorly off for linen; Ulysses, for instance, who, grave, prudent, subtile though he was, did present himself wearing a handful of seaweed only to the most fair Princess Nausicaa, as may be read in Master Homer's Odyssey."

"Unfortunately," replied Sigognac, "my dear Bla-

zius, my only likeness to the brave Greek, King of Ithaca, is that I also am lacking in linen, while my present poverty is not compensated for by anterior exploits. I have had no opportunity to display my valour, and I do not believe I shall ever be sung by poets. I am bound to say, although one ought not to be ashamed of honourable poverty, that I feel ashamed at having to appear in company thus accoutred. The Marquis of Bruyères recognised me, though he keeps the fact to himself, and he might betray my secret."

"Very unfortunate indeed," replied the Pedant; "but there is a cure for everything save death, as the old saw has it. We poor players, shadows of human life and ghosts of people of every rank, — we have at least the *appearance* if we have not the *reality* of things, and the two are as alike as the reflection of an object is like the object itself. Thanks to our wardrobe, which contains all our kingdoms, patrimonies, and lordships, we may, when we please, assume the dress of princes, great barons, and noblemen of proud port and lofty mien. For a few hours we are as bravely attired as the foppiest; dandies and bucks imitate our borrowed elegance which they transform into reality, substituting fine cloth for serge, real gold for imitation, diamonds

for Rhinestones, for the stage is the school of manners and the academy of fashion. As costumer to the company, I can turn a dastard into an Alexander, a penniless devil into a rich lord, a street girl into a great lady. If you will not take it ill, I shall turn my resources to account in your favour, for since you have been kind enough to cast in your lot with us wanderers, you ought at least to make use of us. Throw off that livery of melancholy and poverty that clouds your natural advantages and fills you with unjustifiable mistrust of yourself. I happen to have in reserve in one of my boxes a very neat black velvet dress, trimmed with flame-coloured ribbon, which is not in the least stagey and might be worn by a courtier, for authors and poets nowadays are very fond of putting on the stage contemporary events, under fictitious names, and for this purpose we must have costumes of well-bred people and not of strollers extravagantly disguised in antique or romanesque fashion. I have the chemisette, the silk stockings, the shoes with bows, the mantle, and all the accessories of the costume, which seems to have been cut out purposely to your size as if in anticipation of this adventure. There is nothing wanting, not even the sword."

"As for that, there is no need of it," said Sigognac, with a haughty gesture that betrayed the full pride of the noble that no misfortune can diminish. "I have my father's sword."

"Care for it preciously," returned Blazius, "for a sword is a faithful friend that guards its master's life and honour. It does not forsake him in times of disaster, perils, and ugly encounters, as do flatterers, the vile, parasitical product of prosperity. Our stage swords have neither edge nor point, for they are intended to inflict feigned wounds only, that are cured by the end of the play, and without the use of unguents, lint, or therakia. Your own sword will defend you at need, as it already did when the scarecrow bandit worked off his grim and laughable highway robbery. But suffer me to fetch the clothes from the box in which they are put away; I long to see the chrysalis turn into a butterfly."

Having spoken these words with his customary grotesque grandiloquence, which he made use of in ordinary life as well as in his stage parts, the Pedant left the room and returned shortly afterwards carrying in his arms a parcel of fair size, wrapped up in a napkin, which he respectfully placed on the table.

"If you will put up with an old comic Pedant for a valet," said Blazius, rubbing his hands with satisfaction, "I shall prink and curl you in fine fashion. Every lady will forthwith fall in love with you, for, be it said without offence to the Sigognac cookery, you have fasted long enough in your Tower of Hunger to turn into the very image of a man dying of love. Women believe in the passion of thin men only; corpulent fellows have no chance with them, even did they bear in their mouths the golden chains, symbolic of eloquence, which bound nobles, merchants, and villeins to the lips of Ogmios, the Gallic Hercules. That is the reason, and the sole reason, why I have had but scant success with the fair sex and soon turned to the bottle divine, which is not so particular and favourably welcomes stout men as capable of holding more drink."

Thus did worthy Blazius endeavour to brighten up Baron de Sigognac while engaged in dressing him, for the volubility of his tongue in no wise impaired the deftness of his hands, and even at the risk of being rated for a chatterer and a bore, he thought it better to stun the young nobleman with his flow of words than to allow him to relapse into his moody reflections.

The Baron's toilet was speedily completed, for the

player's art involving rapid changes of costume, actors acquire much dexterity in accomplishing these metamorphoses. Blazius, satisfied with his work, led Baron de Sigognac by the tips of the fingers, just as a bride is led to the altar, to the Venice mirror placed upon the toilet table, and said to him : —

"If your lordship will now kindly look at your lordship."

Sigognac saw in the mirror an image that he at first supposed to be that of some one else, so different was it from his own appearance. He involuntarily turned his head and looked over his shoulder to see if there were not perchance some one behind him. The image reflected his own motion. There could not be any doubt of it, it was he himself; not the wan, sad, pitiful Sigognac that had become almost ridiculous, so wretched was he, but a young, elegant, splendid Sigognac, whose old clothes, cast on the floor, resembled the dull gray skins shed by caterpillars when, as butterflies with wings of gold, cinnabar, and lapis-lazuli, they fly upwards into the heavens. The unknown being who had been imprisoned in that dilapidated casing, had suddenly emerged from it and now shone resplendent under the clear light streaming in through the window, like a

statue which has just been unveiled in some public function. Sigognac saw himself in the guise in which he had occasionally beheld himself in his dreams, a participant, as well as an onlooker, in an imaginary scene occurring within his castle, rebuilt and decorated by the clever architects of dream-land, to receive an adored Infanta riding upon a white palfrey. A smile of pride and triumph flitted for an instant like a purple flush upon his pale lips, and his youth, so long buried beneath the weight of misfortune, showed up again upon his improved features.

Blazius, standing by the toilet-table, was observing his handiwork, drawing back in order to take it in better, like a painter who has just given the last touch to a picture with which he feels satisfied.

"If, as I hope, you make your way at Court and regain your estates, you will have to give me the post of superintendent of your wardrobe, and enable me to retire from the stage," said he, mimicking the bow of a suitor as he stood before the metamorphosed Baron.

"I take note of your request," answered Sigognac, with a melancholy smile. "You are the first human creature, Master Blazius, that ever has asked me for anything."

"After dinner, which we are to have in private, we are to call upon the Marquis for the purpose of showing him a list of the plays we can perform, and to learn from him in what part of the mansion we are to set up our stage. You shall pass for the poet attached to the company, for there are plenty wits in the provinces who from time to time follow in Thalia's train in hopes of winning the heart of some actress or other. The Isabella is a pretty pretext, the more so that she is clever, beautiful, and virtuous. Girls taking her style of parts often play more naturally than the empty-headed and frivolous public imagine."

Whereupon the Pedant, though not conceited, withdrew to attend to his own toilet.

The handsome Leander, still thinking of the lady of the castle, was adorning himself to the best of his ability, in hopes of meeting at last with the impossible intrigue he was constantly in search of, and that, according to Scappino, had so far won him only disappointments and thrashings. As for the actresses, to whom the Marquis de Bruyères had civilly sent pieces of silk dress-stuff, so that they might, if needed, make themselves gowns for their parts, it will easily be believed that they made use of every means to which

art has recourse in order to adorn nature, and that they got themselves up to kill, so far as their meagre wardrobes of strolling players allowed them to do so.

Every one being ready, the company repaired to the dining-room, where the repast was served.

Naturally impatient, the Marquis joined the players at table ere the meal was ended. He would not suffer them to rise, and when the ewer and basin had been passed round, he asked the Tyrant what plays they knew.

"All those of the late Hardy," replied the Tyrant, in his cavernous voice: "'Pyramus,' by Théophile de Viaux, 'Sylvia,' 'Chriseides,' 'Sylvanira,' 'Cardenio's Folly,' 'The Faithless Confidant,' 'Phyllis of Scyra,' 'Lygdamon,' 'The Deceiver Punished,' 'The Widow,' 'The Ring of Forgetfulness,' and whatever has been produced by the prettiest wits of the day."

"For some years past I have lived away from the Court, and I am not familiar with the latest novelties," said the Marquis, modestly. "I should find it difficult to judge between so many excellent plays, most of which are unknown to me. I am of opinion that it will be best to trust to your own judgment, which, backed by both theory and practice, cannot be at fault."

"We have often performed a play," replied the

Tyrant, "that might not perhaps stand being printed and read, but which has always proved most successful in exciting the hearty laughter of our best society by its by-play, its comic repartees, its jokes, and horse-play."

"Then do not look for any other," answered the Marquis de Bruyères. "And pray what is that blessed masterpiece called?"

"'The Rodomontades of Captain Hector.'"

"A capital title, by my faith! Has the maid a good part?" added the Marquis, flashing a glance at Zerbina.

"The daintiest and most roguish of parts, and she plays it to perfection; it is her greatest success. She has always won triumphs in it, and without the aid of a cabal or of paid applauders either."

At this managerial compliment, Zerbina believed it her duty to blush slightly, difficult as it was to make her brown cheeks redden; modesty, that inward rouge, was something she did not possess, and would have been looked for in vain among the cosmetics upon her dressing-table. She cast down her eyes, thus bringing to notice her long dark lashes, and raised her hand as if to protest against words she felt to be too flattering. The gesture drew attention to a small and shapely, if somewhat brown, hand, the little finger coquettishly

apart from the others and the rosy nails shining like agates, having been polished with powdered coral and chamois leather.

Zerbina looked fetching just then. The feigned modesty she affected gives spice to genuine depravation, and tickles libertines, even though they are not duped by it, by the piquancy of the contrast. The Marquis fixed upon the soubrette the hot glance of the connoisseur, while he treated the other women in the company with the mere vague civility of a well-bred man who has made up his mind.

"He did not even inquire what sort of a part the leading lady has," thought Serafina, with intense annoyance. "It is outrageous, and that wealthy nobleman strikes me as singularly devoid of discernment, politeness, and good taste. He is unquestionably a man of low inclinations. His life in the provinces has spoiled him, and his habitual courting of scullion wenches and herd-girls has wholly destroyed any sense of delicacy he ever possessed."

These reflections did not conduce to make Serafina look amiable. Her features were regular, but somewhat hard, and in order to attract required to be softened by the studied grace of her smiles and her fluttering

eyelids. When contracted, as they were at that moment, they were harsh and grumpy. She was unquestionably more beautiful than Zerbina, but there was something aggressive, haughty, and spiteful in her expression. Even had love ventured, fancy would have flown away terrified.

Consequently the Marquis withdrew without having attempted the least flirtation with Serafina or Isabella, the latter of whom, besides, he looked upon as on intimate terms with Sigognac. Before going out, he said to the Tyrant : —

" I have ordered the orangery to be cleared out for you ; it is the largest hall in the house, and you can set up your stage there. Trestles, boards, hangings, seats, and whatever else is needed for an improvised performance have been taken there. Pray oversee the workmen, who are very inexpert in such matters ; work them as a galley slave-driver works his gang ; they will obey you as they would me."

One of the servants conducted the Tyrant, Blazius, and Scappino to the orangery, for they it was who usually looked after the ordering of these matters. The hall was admirably adapted to a dramatic performance, owing to its oblong shape, which allowed of the

stage being set up at one of the ends, and of filling up the vacant space with rows of arm-chairs, chairs, stools, and benches, according to the rank of the spectators and the honour it was desired to pay them. The walls were painted with a green trellis-work upon a blue ground, and represented a rustic architecture, with pillars, arcades, niches, domes, and low vaulting, all in excellent perspective and wreathed round with light foliage and flowers for the purpose of breaking the monotony of the lozenges and the straight lines. The partially arched ceiling represented the sky veined with a few white clouds and spotted with brightly-coloured birds. The whole formed a decoration entirely appropriate to the novel use about to be made of the place.

At one end of the hall a slightly sloping flooring was laid upon trestles, and wooden uprights, intended to support the wings, were set up on either side. Great curtains of tapestry, running upon cords tightly stretched, were to act as a curtain and to be gathered in to right and left on opening like the folds of a proscenium curtain. The frieze was formed of a strip of stuff cut in vandykes, like the trimming of a bed-tester, and completed the framing in of the stage.

While the stage is being constructed, it may be well

to say something of the inhabitants of the castle. I have forgotten to state that the Marquis de Bruyères was married, but I may be forgiven for this, seeing how little he remembered the fact himself. Love, it need hardly be said, had not made the match, which had been brought about because the two contracting parties were equally noble and equally possessed of landed property. After a very brief honeymoon, the Marquis and the Marchioness, like well-bred people who felt uncommonly little drawn to each other, had not foolishly striven to attain impossible happiness. By common unspoken consent, they gave up the idea, and lived apart, though under the same roof, in the most courteous way imaginable and enjoying the utmost freedom compatible with decorum. It must not be inferred from this that the Marchioness de Bruyères was either plain or disagreeable; such was not the case, and though a husband may see nothing to admire, a lover may find much to delight, for love is blind, if marriage is very clear-sighted. Besides, I shall introduce my reader to the Marchioness in person, so that he may judge of her merits for himself.

The Marchioness had her own apartments, into which the Marquis never entered without having him-

self announced. The bedroom was very large, high-ceiled, and sumptuously decorated. The walls were covered with Flanders tapestries, rich, soft, and warm in tone, representing the adventures of Apollo. Curtains of crimson Indian damask fell in heavy folds adown the windows and when traversed by the bright beams of light had the purple transparency of rubies. The bedstead was upholstered with the same material, the breadths of which, marked by galloons, formed sharply broken folds that shimmered in the light. The tester was furnished with a lambrequin like that on the dais, and at the four corners rose great plumes of carnation-coloured feathers. The chimney-piece projected considerably into the room and rose to the ceiling, showing quite plainly, though hung with arras. A tall Venice mirror in a rich crystal frame, the facets and bevels of which sparkled with prismatic light, leaned downwards from the moulding as if to greet those who approached it. On the andirons, formed of superimposed bulbous forms topped by a huge ball of polished metal, blazed and crackled two or three logs that might well have done service as Yule-logs, but the heat they gave out was by no means superfluous at that season and in view of the size of the apartment.

Two cabinets of quaint design, with small pillars of lapis-lazuli and inlaying of ornamental stones, with secret drawers into which the Marquis would not have pried even had he known how to open them, were placed symmetrically on either side of a dressing-table in front of which Madame de Bruyères was seated in one of those armchairs peculiar to the time of Louis XIII., the back of which, at the height of the shoulders, is formed of an upholstered board trimmed with fringe.

Behind the Marchioness stood a couple of tiring-maids, offering her, the one a paper of pins, the other a box of patches.

Her ladyship, although she owned to being twenty-eight years of age, might well be over thirty; but how much over no one, not even the Marchioness herself, could have told, so ingeniously had she muddled up her chronology. Historians most expert in settling dates would have turned gray in the attempt to get at her true age.

She was a brunette whose complexion had been improved by the plumpness that comes after maiden-hood. The olive tones of the thin girl face, that she had been wont to rectify with pearl white and powdered talc, had been replaced by a mat whiteness, somewhat

sickly in the daylight, but dazzling by candlelight. The oval form of her face had filled out without losing anything of its noble contours; her chin melted into her neck by a plump and still graceful curve. Though somewhat too aquiline for feminine beauty, her nose was fine and separated two prominent light-brown eyes, which acquired an air of wonderment through the eyebrows being rather far above the eyes themselves.

Her long black hair had just been dressed by her maid, who must have had a difficult task to perform, if one might judge by the number of curl-papers scattered on the carpet round the dressing-table. A row of small ringlets in the form of love-locks, framed in her face and were crimped at the roots of a mass of hair brushed back to the chignon, while two large bandeaus, lightened up, fluffed out, and crimped with swift, sharp touches of the comb, puffed out on either side her cheeks that they rendered more graceful. A bow of ribbon trimmed with jet set off the thick coil twisted on the back of her neck. The Marchioness' hair was one of her chief charms, and was so abundant that it might be dressed in any fashion without recourse to switches and wigs, and her ladyship therefore was always ready

to receive visitors of either sex while she was in the hands of her tiring-women.

The nape of the neck led the glance down a full, swelling contour to uncommonly white and plump shoulders, left bare by the low-cut bodice, and made the more attractive by two alluring dimples in their plumpness. The bosom, compressed by the whalebone waist, tended to press together the two half-globes which poetic flatterers, writers of madrigals and sonnets, insist on calling the hostile brothers, although they are but too frequently reconciled, differing in this respect from the brothers in the Thebaid.

A black silk cord, on which was strung a ruby heart and from which depended a small cross of precious stones, was passed round her ladyship's neck, as if with the intention of combating the pagan sensuality excited by the display of her well-exposed charms, and to forbid profane desires from approaching the bosom but ill defended by the slight protection of the lace.

Over a white satin underskirt Madame de Bruyères wore an overskirt of dark garnet silk, trimmed with black ribbons and quilted with jet, with wristlets or cuffs like the gauntlets of men-at-arms.

Jane, one of the Marchioness' women, handed her the box of patches, the final touch of the toilet that no lady of fashion at that time would have dispensed with. Madame de Bruyères put one near the corner of her mouth and then spent much time wondering where she would place the other, called "the heart-breaker," because even the most resolutely cold cannot defend themselves from its allurements. The maids, apparently perceiving the seriousness of the situation, remained motionless and repressed their breathing in order not to interrupt the coquettish reflections of their mistress. At last the wavering finger stopped, and a patch of taffeta, a dark star upon a heaven of whiteness, marked like a birthmark the curve of the left breast. It was a way of saying in amorous hieroglyphs that the road to the lips was through the heart.

Satisfied with her appearance, the Marchioness rose and moved out into the room after casting a last glance at the Venice mirror sloping over the dressing-table. But she turned at once, perceiving she lacked something, went back to the table, and drew from a casket a large watch, a Nuremberg egg, as it was called at that time, richly enamelled in diverse colours, enriched with brilliants and hung on a chain with a hook by means

of which she fastened it to her girdle near a little hand-mirror set in a silver-gilt frame.

"Your ladyship is looking particularly well to-day," said Jane, in a caressing tone. "Your ladyship's hair is dressed to great advantage, and the gown is most becoming."

"Do you think so?" returned the Marchioness, drawling out her words with absent-minded nonchalance. "It seems to me, on the contrary, that I am looking my worst. My eyes are sunken, and the shade of my dress makes me look stout. Suppose I were to put on black? What think you, Jane? Black, you know, makes one seem thinner."

"If your ladyship wishes it, I can dress your ladyship in the blackbird's tail taffeta gown or in the plum-bloom one; it will not take me a minute, but I should be afraid of spoiling a costume that becomes your ladyship so well."

"Well, it shall be your fault, Jane, if I put Love to flight and do not gather in this evening my harvest of hearts. Has the Marquis invited many guests to see this play?"

"A number of messengers have gone off on horseback in different directions. There is sure to be a

numerous company; people will come from all the seats in the neighbourhood, for there are so few opportunities of enjoyment in this part of the country."

"That is true," said the Marchioness, with a sigh. "We have to put up with a dreadful dearth of pleasures. And what about the actors themselves, Jane? Have you seen them? Are any of them young, handsome, and of gallant bearing?"

"I can scarcely tell your ladyship, for these people have masks rather than faces; powder, rouge, and wigs make them look well on the stage and give them a totally different appearance. Yet it struck me that there was one who did not look too ragged and who assumes the air of a cavalier. He has fine teeth and a handsome leg."

"He must be the leading lover, Jane," returned the Marchioness. "They always select for that part the handsomest fellow in the company, for it would never do for a knock-kneed man with a turned-up nose to talk sentiment and fall on his knees to declare his love."

"Yes, indeed, it would be very unseemly," said the maid, laughing. "A husband need not be much to look at, but lovers have to be perfection itself."

"That is why I am fond of those stage gallants, who use flowery language, who are expert in dwelling on fine sentiments, who swoon at the feet of a hard-hearted mistress, who call Heaven to witness, curse fate, draw their sword to thrust themselves through, who breathe fire and flames like volcanoes of love, and say things that cause the severest virtue to fall into ecstasy. Their speeches are a delight to my heart, and at times I think they are addressed to me. Often, indeed, the lady's refusals irritate me, and I scold her inwardly for making so true a lover pine and languish the way she does."

"That is because your ladyship is so kind-hearted," returned the maid, "and hates to see people suffer. For my part, I am of a more cruel disposition, and it would please me greatly to see a man die of love for me. Fine talk has never yet had any effect upon me."

"You are practical, Jane, and your mind is somewhat gross. You do not, as I do, read novels and plays. Did you not say just now that the leading lover in this company is a handsome fellow?"

"Your ladyship can judge for herself," said the maid, who was standing by the window, "for he is even now crossing the court, no doubt on his way to the orangery, where the stage is being set up."

The Marchioness drew near the window, and saw the Leander walking slowly, sunk in thought, like a man a prey to an all-consuming passion. In order to be ready for any chance that might occur, he affected an air of unrequited passion that ever awakens the interest of the sex, which so readily divines that there is a heart to be comforted. As he came by the balcony, he looked up in a particular way so as to make his eyes shine, looked long, sadly, and despairingly at the window, as though the victim of hopeless love, though he took care to express at the same time the liveliest and most respectful admiration. On perceiving the Marchioness, who was pressing her face against the pane, he took off his hat, swept the ground with the feather, and made one of those deep bows such as one makes to queens and to divinities, and that mark the distance that exists between the Empyrean and nothingness. Then he put on his hat again with a most graceful gesture, resuming with a proud air his arrogant cavalier mien that for an instant he had laid at the feet of the fair. It was done in clean, sharp, admirable fashion. A genuine nobleman, used to the ways of the world and a frequenter of courts, could not have hit more happily on just the right touch.

Flattered by this salute, at once discreet and submissive, which paid so well the deference due to her rank, Madame de Bruyères could not refrain from replying to it by a slight inclination of the head accompanied by a faint smile.

These favourable signs were not lost on the Leander, and his native conceit forthwith exaggerated their importance. He did not for a moment doubt that the Marchioness had fallen in love with him, and his extravagant imagination straightway set to work to build up a whole romance on this slight basis. He was at last about to realise the dream of his life, to have a love intrigue with a real lady of the world, in an almost princely mansion, he, a poor country actor, full of talent assuredly, but who had never yet played before the Court. Filled with these fancies, he was overwhelmed with delight; his bosom swelled, his heart beat high, and as soon as the rehearsal was over, he returned to his room to indite a note in the most hyperbolical style, which he intended to get to the Marchioness in some way or other.

As every member of the company already knew his or her part, the performance of "The Rodomontades of Captain Hector" began as soon as the Marquis's guests had arrived.

The orangery, transformed into a theatre, looked very attractive. Clusters of wax tapers, fixed to the walls by brackets and plates, shed a soft light that enabled the dresses of the ladies to be properly seen, without, at the same time, interfering with the scenic effect. At the back of the spectators had been placed, on boards arranged in the form of steps, the orange-trees, the flowers and foliage of which, warmed by the pleasant temperature of the hall, gave out the most suave of scents that mingled with the perfumes of musk, benzoin, amber, and iris.

In the front row, close to the stage, in great arm-chairs, sat in radiant beauty Yolande de Foix, the Duchess of Montalban, the Baroness of Hagémeau, the Marchioness de Bruyères, and other ladies of quality, in toilets so rich and elegant that it was plain not one of them meant to be surpassed by any of the others. There was a wealth of velvet, satin, gold and silver stuffs, lace, guipure, gold and silver embroidery, diamond drops, pearl necklaces, aigrettes, pendants of gems that sparkled in the light and cast dazzling beams, to say nothing of the still more brilliant flashes of the lovely eyes of the women. Even at Court it would have been impossible to see a more splendid gathering.

If Yolande de Foix had not been present, there were a number of mortal deities who would have caused a Paris charged with awarding the golden apple to hesitate, but her presence rendered any rivalry impossible. Yet she did not resemble indulgent Venus so much as merciless Diana. The young lady was cruelly beautiful, implacably graceful, despairingly perfect. Her long delicate face seemed to be of agate or onyx rather than of flesh, so pure, ideal, and noble were her features. Her exquisitely turned neck, as flexible as a swan's, was joined by a pure contour to shoulders still somewhat thin and to a youthful bosom, white as snow, which did not heave responsive to the beating of her heart. Her lips, shaped like the goddess's bow, flashed mockery even when she remained silent, and the glance of her cold blue eye disconcerted the coolest attacks. Nevertheless she was irresistibly attractive; her whole person, so insolently splendid, provoked desire to impossibilities. No man could see Yolande without falling in love with her, but few ventured to caress the dream of being loved in return.

How was she dressed? It would take a cooler mind than mine to answer the question! Her garments floated around her like a luminous mist in which she

alone was discernible, but I believe she had strings of pearls in her hair that mingled with the golden curls shining like an aureole.

Behind the ladies were seated, on stools and benches, the noblemen and gentlemen who were the fathers, husbands, or brothers of these beauties. Some bent gracefully over the backs of the arm-chairs and whispered compliments into willing ears; others were fanning themselves with the plumes of their beavers, and others again, standing up, one hand on the hip, and in an attitude calculated to show off their fine figure, were casting a self-satisfied look over the company. A hum of conversation hovered over all like a light mist, and the spectators were just growing impatient when three blows solemnly struck sounded in the hall and at once secured silence.

The curtains parted slowly, and revealed the stage set to represent a public square, an undefined sort of place, convenient for the intrigues and the encounters of primitive comedy. It was a carfax, with houses with pointed gables, projecting stories, small windows set in lead, and chimneys from which naïvely rose corkscrews of smoke that ascended to melt into the clouds of a sky that careful dusting had failed to make as

bright as it had originally been. One of the houses standing at the corner of two streets that made desperate efforts to produce an effect of perspective by driving through the canvas, was furnished with a practicable door and window. The two side-scenes, connected by flies representing the sky and spotted in many a place with oil, were similarly furnished, one of them having, in addition, a balcony that could be ascended by means of a ladder concealed from the spectators, an arrangement that lent itself well to conversations and escalades and elopements after the Spanish fashion. As may be seen, the stage of the little company was well stocked, considering the period. It is true that the painting of the scenery would have struck a connoisseur as somewhat rough and rudimentary; the tiles on the roofs drew the eye by their crude red tones; the foliage of the trees planted in front of the houses was of the most vivid verdigris, and the blue of the sky was of the most impossible azure, but the general effect was that of a public square, if only the spectators were good-natured enough to see it.

A row of twenty-four carefully snuffed candles cast a strong light upon the scenery, that was quite unused to such a brilliant illumination, and the splendour of it

was greeted with a murmur of satisfaction by the audience.

The play opened with a quarrel between the worthy townsman Pandolfo and his daughter Isabella, who, because she had fallen in love with a fair-haired younker, obstinately refused to wed Captain Hector, with whom her father was infatuated. Zerbina, her maid, in the pay of Leander, stood by her through thick and thin, the impudent minx, quick at repartee, replying to the insults Pandolfo hurled at her with unceasing jeers and nonsense, and advising him to wed the hectoring captain himself since he was so fond of him. But as far as she was concerned, she would never suffer her young mistress to become the spouse of a dotard fit only to be slapped and set up in a vineyard to serve as a scarecrow. Whereat the old gentleman, exploding with rage, and wishing to talk to Isabella in private, tried to drive Zerbina home, but she would swing round as the old fellow pushed her and remain just where she was before, and this with such an easy swing of the waist, so naughty a twist of the hips, so coquettish a switching of her skirts, that a professional ballet-dancer could not have improved upon it. At every new attempt on the part of Pandolfo to get rid

of her, she laughed out, apparently caring little that her mouth was large, and exhibited her pearl-like teeth, more dazzling than ever in the light, in a way to make even Heraclitus himself laugh. Her eyes, made brighter by a touch of powder under the lids, sparkled like diamonds; her lips were rouged, and her brand-new skirts, made out of the taffeta presented to her by the Marquis, shimmered and gleamed where they fell in folds and seemed to scatter sparks around.

The whole company applauded her performance, and the Marquis de Bruyères said to himself that he had not erred in picking out this pearl among soubrettes.

A new character now appeared, looking to right and left as if fearing to be surprised. It was Leander, the terror of fathers, husbands, guardians, the beloved of wives, daughters, and wards; the lover, in a word; the man dreamed of, expected, and looked for, who is to fulfil the promises of the ideal, realise the fancies of the poet, the playwright, and the novelist; who is to prove to be youth, love, and happiness; who suffers from none of the disadvantages of humanity, who is never hungry, thirsty, hot, cold, afraid, tired, or ill, but ever ready, night and day, to sigh, to murmur declarations of love, to win over duennas, to bribe maids,

to climb ladders, to draw when surprised or meeting a rival, and, in addition, who is always clean-shaven, dainty in his dress and a wearer of fine linen, with side-long glance and heart in the shape of Cupid's bow.

Perceiving Pandolfo where he had expected to meet Isabella only, Leander stopped and assumed an attitude he had carefully rehearsed in front of his mirror, well aware that it brought out to great advantage the fine points of his figure. The weight of his body resting upon his left leg, his right slightly bent, one hand on the hilt of his sword, the other used to caress his chin so as to show off the famous diamond solitaire ring, his glance laden with fire and languor, his lips parted by a faint smile that allowed his teeth to show, he looked really very well. His costume, renovated with fresh ribbons, his dazzlingly white linen puffing out between his doublet and his trunk-hose, his narrow, high-heeled shoes, adorned with a big rosette, contributed to give him the mien of a thorough cavalier.

Consequently he at once won the ladies, and the mocking Yolande herself did not think him ridiculous. Turning to account his mute by-play, Leander flashed across the foot-lights a seductive glance that he let fall upon the Marchioness with so passionate and beseech-

ing an expression that she blushed in spite of herself, then he turned it upon Isabella, carelessly and lacking lustre, as if to emphasise the difference between real love and the mere imitation of it.

The sight of Leander turned Pandolfo's wrath to exasperation. He dismissed his daughter and Zerbina to their lodging, not quickly enough, however, to prevent the latter slipping into her pocket a note addressed to Isabella, in which the lover asked for a meeting at night. The young gentleman, left alone with Pandolfo, assured him in the politest fashion that his intentions were strictly honourable, that he aimed at forming the most sacred of connections; that he was well born, well thought of by the great, and in good standing at Court. Further, that nothing, not even death itself, could part him from Isabella, whom he loved more than his life, words which the young lady, bending over the balcony and making signs of acquiescence, drank in with delight. Notwithstanding Leander's mellifluous eloquence, Pandolfo, with obstinate senile infatuation, swore by all that was holy that Captain Hector should be his son-in-law, or his daughter should go into a convent. And off he went to fetch the notary to draw up the settlements.

Pandolfo gone, Leander begged his beauty, who was still at the window, for the old gentleman had locked her in, to consent, in order to avoid such a catastrophe, to his carrying her off and taking her to a hermit of his acquaintance who did not in the least object to marry young people the course of whose true love was crossed by the tyrannical will of their parents. Whereto the young lady modestly returned, while avowing that she was not insensible to Leander's passion, that respect was due to one's parents, and that perhaps the hermit he spoke of was not fully qualified to marry people properly, but she did promise to resist to the best of her ability and to enter a convent rather than put her own hand in Captain Hector's big paw.

Then the lover withdrew to put matters in train, with the help of his valet, a cunning rascal, as full of tricks and stratagems as the late Ulysses. He was to return in the evening to report to his lady-love what success he had met with.

Isabella closed her window, and Captain Hector made his entry with characteristic timeliness. His appearance, which was expected, was very effective, for the most morose were moved to laughter by this personage.

Although there was no earthly reason for his indulging in such frantic gestures, the Swashbuckler, stretching his long legs like a pair of dividers and striding along with six-foot paces, marched down to the footlights and planted himself there in a swaggering, insolent, and provocative attitude as though he challenged the whole company to mortal combat. He twisted his mustache, rolled his big eyes, breathed hard through his nose, and swelled out his chest just as if he were choking with wrath at an insult that could be atoned for only by the annihilation of all mankind.

He had drawn from the bottom of his trunk for this great occasion, a costume, almost new, which he wore on great days only, and the comical quaintness and grotesquely Spanish eccentricity of which were brought out by his skinny figure. It consisted of a doublet that flared out like a corselet, and that was striped diagonally red and yellow, the stripes converging in a row of buttons arranged like overset chevrons. The point of the doublet reached low down the stomach; round the edges and upon the shoulders were round pads of the same colours; stripes, like those on the doublet, wound round the sleeves and trunk-hose, making his legs and thighs look for all the world like

an onion roll. If a cock were dressed up in red stockings it would give a very good idea of the Swashbuckler's legs. Huge yellow rosettes spread out on his red slashed shoes like big cabbages; garters, with hanging ends, were fastened above the knee round his legs as straight as a heron's. A ruff mounted on cardboard, the starched folds of which formed a series of figures of eight, held his neck rigid and compelled him to hold his chin well up, a posture well suited to the impertinence of his part. His head-dress consisted of a sort of beaver of the Henry IV pattern, with one side of the brim turned up and adorned with a crest of red and white feathers. A cloak, the edges of which were cut like the wattles of a crayfish, and which reproduced the colours of the rest of the costume, flew out behind him, cocked up in burlesque fashion by the end of his immense rapier, the heavy shell-guard of which caused the point to stick up. From the end of this long thrusting sword, on which ten Moors might have been skewered, hung an ornament delicately worked in exceedingly fine brass wire, representing a cobweb, and testifying irrefutably to the very infrequent use Captain Hector made of his redoubtable weapon. Such of the spectators as were

gifted with stronger sight were able to make out the little metal insect hanging at the end of its thread in the most assured peace, as though certain of not being disturbed.

Captain Hector, followed by his valet, Scappino, the health of whose eyes was constantly threatened by the end of the rapier, strode two or three times up and down the stage, stamping his heels, pulling his beaver down over his eyes and indulging in endless absurd pantomime that made the spectators roar with laughter. At last he stopped, and attitudinising in front of the footlights, began a speech full of brag, exaggeration, and rodomontade, somewhat as follows, and in which a scholar would have found evidence that the author of the play had read Plautus' "Miles gloriosus," the ancestor of the whole line of braggart swashbucklers.

"To-day, Scappino, I consent to let my slayer rest in its sheath for a short time, and to leave to physicians the task of filling the graveyards, of which I am the great purveyor. When a man has dethroned the Sophi of Persia, dragged Armorabaraquin from his camp by the beard, and with the other hand slain ten thousand infidel Turks, kicked down the ramparts of a hundred fortresses, defied Fate, flayed Chance alive, burned

Misfortune, plucked like a gosling Jove's eagle on his refusing to meet me on the field when I summoned him, for he dreads me more than the Titans, struck fire with thunderbolts, torn heaven open with the curled up end of his mustache, he may surely permit himself to indulge in a little recreation and sportiveness. Besides, the submissive universe no longer resists my courage, and Atropos has sent me word that her shears having become blunted by dint of cutting the thread of the lives garnered in by my bilbo, she has been compelled to send them to the knife-grinder's. Therefore, Scappino, I must e'en restrain my valour, and grant a truce to duels, wars, devastations, sacking of towns, hand-to-hand fights with giants, and slaughters of monsters after the manner of Theseus and Hercules, the ordinary occupations of the ferocity of my undaunted bravery. I am resting; Death may take breath! But how does Sir Mars, a mere nobody in comparison of me, spend his holidays and vacations? In the plump white arms of Lady Venus, who, like a wise goddess, prefers warriors to all other men, and feels the utmost contempt for her lame cuckold husband. That is why I have been kind enough to condescend to become more tractable, and perceiving that

Cupid dared not venture to let fly one of his gold-tipped shafts at a dare-devil like me, I encouraged him with a nod. Further, in order that his arrow might strike at my bold lion heart, I put off the coat of mail made out of the rings given me by my illustrious paramours, the goddesses, empresses, queens, infantas, princesses, and great ladies of every land, and the magical temper of which protects me in my maddest temerity."

"That means," said the valet, who had listened to this fiery tirade with an air of extreme disturbance of mind, "so far as my poor intellect can follow eloquence so admirable for its rhetoric, and so adorned with suitable expressions and with Oriental metaphors, that your most valiant lordship's fancy has been caught by some young bud in this town; in other words, that you are in love just like an ordinary mortal."

"Truly," replied Captain Hector, with superbly nonchalant good temper, "you have hit the nail on the head, and for a valet you are not too much of a fool. Yes, I have yielded to the infirmity of love, but fear not that it will diminish my courage; that is all very well for Samson, who allowed himself to be shorn, and for Hercules who span. Delilah would never have dared to touch my hair, and I should have used

Omphale as a bootjack: at the least sign of refusal, I should have made her clean the skin of the Nemean lion on a table like a Spanish cape. In the course of my leisure time the thought, a humiliating one to a brave heart, occurred to me that while it is true that I have conquered the human race, I have overcome but one-half of it. Women, thanks to their feebleness, escape me. It would not be seemly to hack off their heads, to lop off their legs and arms, to cut them down to the waist, as is my custom with my masculine foes; such martial brutality is repugnant to a well-bred man. The conquest of their hearts, the surrender at discretion of their souls, the spoiling of their virtue, satisfy me. Yet, while it is true that those who have yielded to me are more in number than the sands of the sea and the stars in heaven, that I drag round with me four coffers filled with love-letters, amorous epistles and messages, that I sleep upon a mattress stuffed with nut-brown, black, golden, and auburn locks which the most modest of women have bestowed upon me; that Juno herself made advances to me that I would none of because her immortality was somewhat over ripe for me, even though she renews her virginity every year in the Canathian spring, — yet, I say, I count all these victories

defeats, for I will not have a laurel wreath in which a single leaf is wanting; it would dishonour my brow. The lovely Isabella dares to resist me, and although audacity is always welcomed by me, I cannot bear with this impertinence on her part. I mean, therefore, that she shall herself, dishevelled and praying for pardon and mercy, on her bended knees, bring me the golden keys of her heart upon a silver salver. Go and summon that strong place to surrender. I grant three minutes for reflection; during that interval the hour-glass shall tremble in the hands of terrified Time."

Whereupon Captain Hector assumed an extravagantly angular attitude, that was made all the more ridiculous by his uncommon emaciation.

But the window did not open in response to the sarcastic summons of the valet. Confiding in the strength of the walls, and not afraid of a breach being made, the garrison, composed of Isabella and Zerbina, gave no sign of life. The Swashbuckler, whom nothing could surprise, was nevertheless amazed at this silence.

"Blood and wounds! Heavens and earth! Thunderbolts and gunshots!" roared he, his mustache bristling like the whiskers of an angry cat. "The hussies

keep as still as dead goats. Let them hoist the flag and sound a parley, or with a snap of my fingers I bring the house down about their ears! It will serve that cruel girl right if she is crushed under its ruins. Scappino, my friend, how do you account for so Hyrcanian and savage a defence against my charms, which, as every one knows, are unrivalled on this terraqueous globe as well as in Olympus, the dwelling of the gods?"

"I account for it quite readily. There is a certain Leander, not so handsome as you, no doubt, but then every one is not endowed with good taste, who has managed to make friends with the garrison. You are attacking a fortress that has already surrendered to another victor; you have won over the father, and Leander has won the daughter; that is the whole thing in a nutshell."

"Leander, did you say? Do not repeat his execrable and execrated name, lest in mad fury I bring down the sun, put out the moon, and catching hold of this world of ours by the end of the axle, shake it in such fashion as to bring about another diluvial cataclysm like that which Noah and Ogyges witnessed. To pay court to Isabella, the lady of my dreams, and that to my very face! The damnable coxcomb! The gal-

lows bird! The unmitigated rascal! Where is he, that I may slash his face for him, spit him on my rapier, run him through, pink him in every part of his body, tear him to pieces, disembowel him, trample upon him, cast him on a burning pile, and scatter his ashes to the four winds of heaven! If he only dared to show his face while I am in this paroxysm of fury, the mere thunder of my nostrils would suffice to propel him beyond the spheres into the region of elemental fires; I should hurl him to such a height that he could never again fall upon this earth! Poaching on my own preserves! I shudder at the thought of the calamities and disasters such audacity must entail for the unhappy race of men, for I could not punish so black a crime as it deserves without shattering the planet at a stroke! Leander the rival of Captain Hector! By Mahomet and Tervagant! Speech draws back terrified and refuses to express such enormity. Words will not come together; they howl and shriek when caught hold of by the collar to put them in line, for they know they would have to answer to me for indulging in such license. From this time forth and for evermore, Leander — forgive me, O my tongue, for causing thee to utter that infamous name! — may consider himself a

dead man, and the best thing he can do is to go and order his tombstone, provided I am magnanimous enough to allow him Christian burial!"

"By the blood of Diana!" said the valet, "you have the devil's own luck, for here comes Master Leander stepping daintily across the square. How gloriously you will now take him to task, and what a splendid sight will be the meeting of two such brave men, for I will not conceal from you that the young gentleman is considered by the fencing masters in this town to be a pretty good hand with the rapier. Draw, and for my part I shall stand guard while you are fighting, so that you may not be disturbed by the watch."

"The flashing of our swords will suffice to drive it away; the fools would not venture to penetrate into the circle of flames and blood. Keep close to me, good Scappino, so that if by chance I should be grievously wounded by a sore thrust, you may be at hand to catch me in your arms," answered the Swashbuckler, who greatly enjoyed being interrupted in a duel.

"Plant yourself bravely before him," returned the valet, pushing his master forward, "and bar his way."

Perceiving that there was no other way out of it, the Swashbuckler pulled his beaver well down on his eyes,

curled up his mustache, put his hand on the hilt of his mighty rapier, and approached Leander, whom he looked at from head to foot in his most insolent manner; but it was plainly all brag on his part, for his teeth chattered audibly and his spindle shanks were swaying and quivering like reeds in the blast. His last remaining hope was that he might intimidate Leander by vocal outbursts, threats, and rodomontades, for hares are not infrequently concealed under lions' skins.

"Sir, are you aware that I am Captain Hector, of the famous house of Cuerno de Cornazan, and allied to the no less illustrious family of Escobombardon de la Papirontonda? And that I am descended from Antæus on the female side?"

"You may descend from the moon if you like," answered the Leander, with a disdainful shrug of the shoulders. "I care not a stiver for all your foolery."

"Thunder and lightning! you will have to care for it anon; so while it is still time, get out of this, and I spare your life. I have pity on your youth. Consider me well; I am the Terror of the Universe, the Friend of Death, the Providence of grave-diggers. Wherever I pass spring up mortuary crosses. Scarcely does my shadow venture to follow me, so perilous are the places

wherein I lead it. When I enter a place, it is through the breach; when I go out, it is through an arch of triumph; if I advance, it is in order to lunge; if I draw back, it is to take ground; when I lay down, it is my adversary, upon his death-bed; the streams I cross are streams of blood, and the bridges that span them are built of the bones of my foes. I plunge with delight into the mêlée, killing, hacking, slaughtering, cutting and thrusting, lunging and piercing. I toss horses and horsemen into the air, and break the bones of elephants as if they were but straw. In storming cities, I escalade the walls with the help of a couple of stilettoes, and plunge my arm into the barrels of the cannons from which I extract the balls. The mere wind of my sword overthrows battalions like sheaves of wheat upon the threshing-floor. When Mars meets me on the battlefield, he flees, lest I should strike him down, great god of war though he is; in a word, so wondrous is my valour and so tremendous the terror I inspire that until now, I, the Apothecary of Death, have never seen anything but the backs of the bravest men."

"Well, you shall now see the face of one of them," returned Leander, as he smote the Swashbuckler so

mighty a box on the ear that the burlesque echo of it resounded throughout the hall. The poor devil was fairly swung round by the force of the blow, and was nearly falling when a second box, this time on the other ear, made him recover his equilibrium.

While this scene was going on, Isabella and Zerbina had reappeared on the balcony; the roguish maid was holding her sides with laughter, and her mistress nodded in friendly fashion to Leander. From the end of the square came Pandolfo, accompanied by the notary, who with eyes like saucers and hands outspread in surprise, watched Leander thrashing Captain Hector.

"By the scales of the crocodile and the horns of the rhinoceros!" howled the boaster, "your grave is yawning wide, you rapscallion, you ruffian, you caitiff; and I shall hurl you into it. Better would it have been for you to pull the whiskers of tigers and the tails of snakes in the Indian jungle! To dare to tease Hector! Why, Pluto himself, armed with his pitchfork, would not be so venturesome. If he were, I should cast him down from the throne of Hell and usurp Proserpina. Come, man-slaying sword of mine, flash out, and bury thy thunderbolt self in the bowels of this hothead. I thirst for his blood, I hunger for his marrow, for his

heart and his liver, and I shall drag his soul out from between his teeth."

While thus shouting, the Swashbuckler, with swelling muscles, rolling eyes, and clickings of the tongue, seemed to be making prodigious efforts to draw his unwilling sword from its sheath. He panted with the exertion, but the prudent thunderbolt man-slayer proposed to stay where it was on this occasion, no doubt in order to avoid dimming its polished steel by contact with the damp air.

Tired of watching the Swashbuckler's grotesque contortions, the lover bestowed upon the braggart a kick so hearty that it sent his rival flying to the other end of the stage, and then, with an exquisitely graceful bow to Isabella, he withdrew.

Captain Hector, having fallen upon his back, was kicking his thin legs about like a grasshopper that has been upset. When, with the assistance of Pandolfo and his valet, he had at last been set upon his feet, and had made certain that Leander was really gone, he burst out, panting and breathing hard as if suffocated by anger: —

"I pray thee, Scappino, bind me round with iron bands; I am bursting with fury, I shall explode like a

bombshell! And as for thee, perfidious blade, that playest thy master false in the deadliest crisis, is this how thou rewardest me for imbuing thee constantly with the blood of the haughtiest warriors and the most valiant duellists? I know not why I do not break thee in a thousand pieces across my knee, for thy cowardice, thy falseness, and thy felony! But no doubt thou desiredst to make me understand that a true soldier's place is on the breach, and that he must not dally within the Capua of love. And it is too true that this whole week I have defeated no army, slain no monster, fought no dragon, that I have failed to provide Death with its supply of bodies, and therefore it is my sword has rusted; rusted with shame, stuck through lack of service! That coxcomb has insulted me under the very eyes of my love; insulted me, jeered at me, challenged me! It is a lesson, a profound one; the very teaching of philosophy; a moral apologue. Henceforth I slay two or three men before breakfast, to make sure that my rapier shall draw easily. Be sure to remind me of it."

"Leander might return," said Scappino. "Suppose we were to try together to draw your redoubtable weapon from its sheath."

Forthwith the Swashbuckler braced himself against a

stone, and Scappino took hold of the shell hilt, Pandolfo hanging on to the valet, and the notary to Pandolfo. After a few attempts the blade yielded to the efforts of the three oddities, who promptly rolled over on their backs, while Captain Hector tumbled over with his long legs in the air, still grasping with both hands the sheath of the rapier.

Picking himself up at once, he seized the weapon and said grandiloquently : —

" Now Leander has ceased to live. His only chance of escaping death is to emigrate to some distant planet, for even were he to burrow into the very centre of the earth, I should bring him back to the surface and transfix him with my sword, unless my terrifying Medusa-like aspect had previously changed him to stone."

Notwithstanding the little unpleasantness, obstinate old Pandolfo abated not a jot of his belief in the heroism of Captain Hector, and persisted in his absurd idea of giving his daughter Isabella in marriage to this splendid fellow. Isabella melted into tears, and said she preferred a convent to such a husband, while Zerbina stood up for the handsome Leander to the best of her ability and swore by her spotless reputation — a fine thing to swear by, truly ! — that the marriage should never take

place. The Swashbuckler attributed the coldness of his reception to excess of modesty, for well brought up girls avoid showing their love. Besides, he had not yet begun to pay his court to the lady; he had not exhibited himself in all his glory, imitating in this respect the discreet conduct of Jupiter towards Semele, who, because she desired to behold her divine lover in all the splendour of his power, was blasted by fire and reduced to a tiny heap of ashes.

The two women returned to their lodging without listening further to him. Captain Hector, desiring to play the gallant, had Scappino fetch him a guitar, and resting one foot upon the post, began to tickle the instrument to make it laugh. Then he began to miaoul a stanza of a seguidilla, in Andalusian, with such extraordinary swelling of the voice, such strange single breaths, and such impossible falsetto notes, that it sounded like the serenade of Rominagrobis under the White Cat's gutter.

Zerbina poured a pailful of water upon him, under pretext that she was watering the flowers, but it failed to quench his musical ardour.

"Tears of tenderness falling from the lovely eyes of Isabella," remarked Captain Hector. "In me the hero

has an artist for his double, and I handle the lyre as well as I do the sword."

Unfortunately, Leander, worried by the strains of the serenade, which he heard as he wandered in the neighbourhood, turned up again, resolved that the rascal should not perform under the balcony of his lady-love, and snatched the guitar from the hands of the Swashbuckler, who was pale with fright. Then he dealt him such a crack over the poll with it that the body of the instrument was broken open, and the braggart's head passing through, he was caught by the neck as in a Chinese cangue. Leander, without letting go the handle of the guitar, pulled the unhappy Hector hither and thither, jerking him round, shoving him against the side-scenes, and pushing him over the footlights till he nearly caught fire, all of which by-play was as amusing as it was ridiculous. What the unfortunate Swashbuckler, who appeared to be wearing a frying-pan on his head, looked like, may be easily imagined.

But this was not the end of his troubles. Leander's valet, with his well-known fertility of invention, had prepared a stratagem to prevent the marriage of Isabella and the Captain. Set on by him, a certain Doralise, exceedingly coquettish and given to flirtation,

turned up, accompanied by a brave brother, the part being taken by the Tyrant, who had put on his most ferocious expression and who carried under his arm a couple of long rapiers that formed a Saint Andrew's cross of terrifying aspect. The young lady complained of having been wronged by Captain Hector, whom she charged with having deserted her in favour of Isabella, Pandolfo's daughter, an outrage that could be atoned for only by the shedding of blood.

"Polish off quickly that cut-throat," said Pandolfo to his future son-in-law. "It will be mere play for your incomparable valour, that even a whole camp of Saracens could not daunt."

Much against his will, Captain Hector fell on guard after innumerable comical grimaces, but he trembled like an aspen, and the bravo, Doralise's brother, sent his weapon flying the very first time their blades crossed, and then smote him with the flat of his sword until the poor fellow begged for mercy.

By way of topping the ridiculous business, dame Leonardo, dressed as a Spanish duenna, came on, wiping her owl-like eyes with a huge handkerchief, uttering sighs unutterable, and waving in front of Captain Hector's face a promise of marriage sealed with the

forged seal of the Swashbuckler. Another storm of blows broke upon the wretch convicted of so many perfidies, and he was unanimously condemned to espouse the Leonardo woman as a punishment for his bragging, his rodomontades, and his cowardice. Pandolfo, disgusted with him, no longer objected to giving his daughter's hand to Leander, an accomplished gentleman.

This buffoonery, enlivened as it was by the performance of the actors, was received with loud applause. The men thought the maid fetching; the women allowed that Isabella was decorously charming, but Captain Hector it was who won the loudest and most unanimous plaudits, for it would have been hard to find any one who united more completely the requirements of the part in himself: uncommon leanness, pomposity of speech, and grotesqueness and unexpectedness of gesture. Leander was admired by the beauties, though the men thought him a fop. This was the impression he generally made, and, indeed, he cared not to produce any other, for he was vainer of his person than of his art. Nor did Serafina's beauty fail to find admirers, and more than one young gentleman, at the risk of incurring the displeasure of his lovely neighbour, swore to himself that she was adorable.

Sigognac, concealed in the wings, had derived the greatest delight from Isabella's performance, although he had felt occasional twinges of jealousy on hearing the tender tones in which she replied to Leander, for he was not yet used to stage love-making, which often conceals deep aversion and downright enmity. So, when the play came to an end, he complimented the young actress in a constrained fashion that she at once noted, and the cause of which she guessed without difficulty.

"You play the part of a girl in love in the most admirable way; so well, indeed, that you might easily be thought to be in earnest."

"That is precisely my business," answered the young lady, with a smile, "and it is for that very purpose that the manager engaged me."

"No doubt," returned Sigognac; "but you seemed really in love with that coxcomb, who can only show his teeth like a dog that is being teased, turn out his toes, and parade his shapely leg."

"My part compelled me to look as though I were in love with him. Would you have had me stand there like a stick, pulling a sour and disagreeable face? And, for the matter of that, did I not maintain the character

of a well-bred girl? If I failed in this respect, I beg you will tell me, and I shall make amends."

"Oh! no; you did look like a modest girl, brought up carefully in the school of good manners, and there is no fault to be found with your artistic performance, so true and so modest that it literally held the mirror up to nature."

"My dear Baron, the lights are going out, the company has withdrawn, and we shall be finding ourselves in the dark. Pray throw this cape over my shoulders and take me to my room."

Sigognac performed, not too awkwardly, though his hands trembled, the duties, new to him, of escort to an actress, and they issued together from the hall, in which there was now no one left.

The orangery was situated a short distance from the mansion, and somewhat to the left of it, in a thick grove of trees. The façade of the castle upon this side was not less splendid than upon the other. As the level of the park was lower on this side than on that of the flower garden, the building stretched along a terrace with a balustrade formed of paunchy pilasters, and broken at intervals by pedestals that upbore vases of blue and white china containing shrubs and flowers,

the last of the season. A double flight of steps, projecting beyond the supporting wall of the terrace, led down to the park, the wall itself being formed of great brick panels framed in stone-work. The general appearance was quite majestic.

It was about nine o'clock at night; the moon had risen, and a light mist, like a silvery gauze, softened the outlines of objects, though it did not prevent their being distinguished. The façade of the castle was clearly seen; some of the windows glowed red, while others, on which the beams of the orb of night fell, sparkled suddenly with a flashing like that of fish-scales. In that light the rosy tones of the brick-work turned to a most delicate lilac shade, and the stone courses became pearly gray. White reflections played upon the slates of the roofs as upon polished steel, and the dentellated crest stood out black against a sky of milky transparency. Drops of light fell upon the leaves of the shrubbery, splashed upon the enamelled vases, and diapered with brilliants the sward that stretched out beyond the terrace. When the gaze roamed farther afield, it beheld a no less enchanting sight, the drives and walks in the park vanishing in the distance, as in Paradise Breughel's landscapes, in azure dimness and

mistiness, with here and there the silvery gleam of a statue or of a pond.

Isabella and Sigognac ascended the steps, and, charmed with the beauty of the night, took a few turns up and down the terrace before going to their rooms. As the place was quite open and in full view of the house, the young actress' modesty was in no wise alarmed by this evening stroll. Besides, the Baron's shyness reassured her, for although her parts were those of innocent young girls, she knew enough of love to be aware that the characteristic of true passion is respectfulness. Sigognac had not formally declared himself, but she felt he loved her, and consequently feared no insult to her virtue.

With the sweet shyness of nascent love, the young couple, as they walked side by side, arm in arm, in the solitary park, talked of the most insignificant trifles only. Had any one been spying upon them, he would have overheard, to his surprise, merely commonplaces, meaningless reflections, and very ordinary questions and answers. But while the words themselves gave no inkling of passion, the trembling voices, the accents of emotion, the long pauses, the sighs, and the low, confi-

dential tone of the conversation betrayed the inmost thoughts of the pair.

Yolande's room, being near that of the Marchioness herself, looked out upon the park, and when the young lady, after her women had made her ready for bed, happened to gaze out at the moon that shone above the great trees, she caught sight of Sigognac and Isabella strolling on the terrace, unattended save by their own shadows. Assuredly, haughty Yolande, proud like the goddess she was, felt naught but contempt for poor Baron de Sigognac, past whom she had at times flashed like a dazzling vision in a whirlwind of light and sound when she was out hunting, and whom, indeed, she had recently almost insulted. Nevertheless she was annoyed to see him under her window, in company with a young woman to whom he was certainly making love, for she did not admit that a man could thus throw off his allegiance to her; all were bound to die in silence for her. So she went to bed in a pretty bad temper, and found it somewhat difficult to woo sleep to her eyes, for the amorous couple preoccupied her greatly.

Sigognac escorted Isabella to her room, and just as he was about to enter his own, he observed at the end of the passage a mysterious individual wrapped in a

dun-coloured cloak, the end of which, thrown over his shoulder, concealed his face up to the eyes, while a beaver pulled well down hid the upper part and protected him as effectually as a mask. When he saw Isabella and the Baron, he drew as close to the wall as he could. It could be no one of the actors, for all had retired to their rooms; besides, the Tyrant was taller, the Pedant stouter, and Leander slimmer; the man did not look like either Scappino or the Swashbuckler, the latter of whom was so easily recognisable by his uncommon leanness, that not even the ample folds of a mantle could disguise.

Not wishing to appear inquisitive and to interfere with the unknown, Sigognac hastened to enter his own room, noticing, however, that the door of the Tapestry Chamber, occupied by Zerbina, was discreetly ajar, as if she were awaiting a visitor who desired not to be heard entering. Once within his room, Sigognac was made aware by a faint creaking of shoes and the soft, careful shooting of a bolt, that the cloaked prowler had safely reached the haven where he would be.

An hour later, Leander opened his door very gently; looked round to see whether the hall was clear, and treading as lightly as a gipsy girl performing the egg-

dance, made for the stairs, which he descended more softly and more noiselessly than ghosts that wander in haunted castles. Once outside, he followed the wall, keeping carefully in the shadow, and proceeded towards a grove or arbour, in the centre of which stood a statue of Discreet Love, represented with its finger on its lips. At this place, no doubt indicated to him beforehand, Leander stopped and seemed to be expecting some one.

I have already mentioned that, interpreting to his advantage the smile the Marchioness had bestowed upon him in recognition of his bow, he had boldly ventured to write her a letter, which Jane, bribed with a few pistoles, had engaged to place secretly on her mistress' dressing-table.

The letter read as follows, and I give the copy of it in order to afford an idea of the style employed by Leander to seduce great ladies, an art in which he claimed to excel.

" Madam, or rather Goddess of Beauty, blame your own incomparable charms alone for the mishap that is befalling you. They it is that compel me by their brilliancy to emerge from the shadows in which I ought to remain buried, and to draw near unto your radiance, even as dolphins rise from the depths of Ocean attracted

by the gleams of the fishermen's lanterns, though these are the signal of their doom, and knowing that they will pitilessly perish under the blows of the sharp harpoons. I know too well that the wave will be imbrued with my gore, yet, as I cannot live, I care not if I die. It is, I trow, most strange audacity in me to indulge in the hope, reserved for the gods alone, that I may receive my death-stroke from your own hand. Nevertheless I venture to ask it, for being reduced to desperation beforehand, nothing worse can befall me, and I prefer your anger to your contempt or your disdain. When one strikes a mortal blow, one must look upon the victim, and while expiring under your cruelties, I shall taste the supreme joy of having been seen by you. Yes, Madam, I love you, and if it be a crime, I none the less do not repent of it. God allows Himself to be adored; the stars tolerate the admiration of the meanest herd, and it is the fate of such exalted perfection as yours that it can be loved only by its inferiors, since it has no equal upon earth, and scarcely in heaven itself. I am, alas! but a poor strolling player, but even were I a Duke, a Prince, laden with all the favours of Fortune, my head would not reach to your feet, and there would still be between your splen-

dour and my nothingness the vast space that separates the highest of summits from the lowest of depths. You will always have to stoop to accept the offering of a heart, but mine, I dare say it, Madam, is as proud as it is tender, and she who did not repel it would find it filled with the most ardent love, the most perfect scrupulousness, the most absolute respect, and the most unbounded devotion. Besides, did such happiness come to me, your indulgence would perhaps not have to stoop as low as you may fancy, for, although compelled by adverse Fate and the jealous rancour of one of the great of the earth to conceal myself on the stage under the disguise of the part I play, my birth is not such that I need blush for it, and if I dared violate the secrecy imposed upon me by reasons of State, it would be seen that fairly illustrious blood flows in my veins. The woman who may love me will not love beneath her rank. But I have said more than I ought, and I shall ever be no more than the most humble and the least of your servants, even if, through one of those recognitions which serve to bring tragedies to a close, every one should salute in me a Prince's son. Let but one sign, the faintest, give me to understand that my boldness has not moved you to too disdainful anger, and I

shall expire without regret, in the fire of your glance, upon my funeral pyre."

In order to tell what the Marchioness might have replied to this burning epistle, which had perchance done service before, one would need to know the feminine heart very thoroughly. Unfortunately, the letter never reached its destination. Leander, in his craze for great ladies, never bestowed a single glance upon their maids and never flirted with them; wherein he was wrong, for maids have much influence upon their mistresses. Had the pistoles wherewith he had bribed Jane been accompanied by a few kisses and a few liberties, Jane, whose lady's-maid self-love would have been satisfied, and deserved to be so as much as a queen's, would have been more zealous and faithful in the discharge of her mission.

As she happened to be holding Leander's letter carelessly in her hand, she was met by the Marquis, who, not being naturally an inquisitive husband, asked her, merely as a matter of form, what the paper was she was carrying.

"Nothing much," she answered; "a letter from Mr. Leander to her ladyship."

"From Leander, the leading man in the company?

The one who plays the lover's part in 'The Rodomontades of Captain Hector'? What can he have to write to my wife about? No doubt he is asking for a gratuity."

"I do not think so," answered the dissatisfied maid, "for when he handed me the note he kept on sighing and turning up his eyes like a love-sick swain."

"Give me the letter," said the Marquis. "I shall be answerable for it. And say nothing to the Marchioness about it; these strollers are occasionally impertinent, and spoiled by our indulgence, forget to keep their place."

And the Marquis, who dearly loved a joke, caused a reply to be written to Leander, couched in the same flowery style, in a big lordly hand, on musk-scented paper, and sealed with perfumed Spanish wax and a fancy seal, in order the better to excite the poor fool's amorous imagination.

When Leander returned to his room after the performance, he found on his table, in the most conspicuous place, a note left by some unknown hand, and bearing the superscription, "For Mr. Leander."

He opened it trembling with delight and read as follows: —

"As you have said but too truly for my peace of mind, goddesses may love mortals alone. At eleven o'clock, when all on earth are sleeping, Diana, not having to fear mortals' indiscreet glances, will descend to meet Endymion, not on Mount Latmos, but in the park, at the foot of the statue of Discreet Love, where the handsome shepherd must be sure to be sleeping in order to spare the blushes of the goddess, who will come unattended by her train of nymphs, shrouded in a cloud, and having put aside her silvery beams."

It may readily be imagined what mad joy filled Leander's heart on reading this note, the contents of which went far beyond his wildest conceit. He poured a whole bottle of scent upon his hair and his hands, chewed a piece of mace to improve his breath, brushed his teeth anew, twisted the end of his ringlets to make them curl more, and proceeded to the park, to the spot indicated, where, while I have been telling you all this, I have left him waiting all forlorn.

The excitement of waiting and the coolness of the night made him shiver nervously; he started at the least fall of a leaf, and listened for the faintest noise with an ear practised to catch the whisper of the prompter; the sand creaking under his feet seemed to

make a dreadful uproar that must certainly be audible in the mansion. In spite of himself the sacred terror of the great woods was overpowering him, and the mighty, sombre trees acted upon his imagination. He was not exactly afraid, but his thoughts were becoming somewhat lugubrious. The Marchioness was late in coming, and Diana was making Endymion wait rather long in the night-dew. Once he thought he heard a dry branch crack under the tread of some one, but it was too heavy to be the step of his divinity; deities glide on beams of sun or moon, and alight without causing even a blade of grass to bend.

"If her ladyship does not make haste," thought Leander, "instead of a gallant full of ardour she will find only a very chilly lover. Such tiring long waits are not conducive to earnest love-making."

He had got no farther in his reflections when four stout shadows, emerging from behind the trees and the pedestal of the statue, came simultaneously upon him. Two of these shadows, which were the bodies of tall fellows, lackeys in the service of the Marquis, seized the player's arms and held them like those of captives that are to be bound, while the two others set about thrashing him in regular rhythm. The blows rattled

on his back like sledge-hammers on an anvil, but as the poor wretch desired above all to avoid attracting people to the spot by making an outcry and thus rendering his misfortune public, he bore the pain heroically. Mucius Scævola stood having his hand burned off in the brasier no more stolidly than Leander stood the blows of the sticks.

The full tale of strokes having been administered, the four torturers let their victim go, bowed low to him, and withdrew without having uttered a word.

But oh! the shameful fall! Icarus himself, precipitated from high heaven, came not down in more piteous fashion. Bruised, mauled, sore, and black and blue all over, Leander limped back to the house, bent in two and rubbing his ribs; but so vast was his conceit that it never occurred to him that he was the victim of a practical joke. His self-love found it more expedient to give a tragical turn to the adventure. He said to himself that, no doubt, the Marchioness, having been watched by her jealous husband, had been followed and seized upon ere she could reach the meeting-place, and had been compelled by threats against her life to confess everything. He could see her on her knees, her beautiful hair loose, asking

mercy of the wrathful Marquis, shedding tears in abundance, and promising to be henceforth more on her guard against a possible surprising of her love. Even while stiff and sore from the blows he had received, he pitied her for having run such peril for his sake, wholly unsuspecting that she knew not a word of the business and was even then resting very peacefully between her Holland linen sheets, that had been carefully warmed with a warming-pan filled with sandal-wood and cinnamon.

As he made his way along the passage, Leander was annoyed by the sight of Scappino's head stuck out of his half-opened door; he noted that the wretch was sniggering. He drew himself up as well as he could, but the cunning beggar was not to be fooled.

The next morning the company prepared to depart. The ox-cart was given up as being too slow a mode of conveyance, and the Tyrant, handsomely paid by the Marquis, hired a big four-horse waggon to transport the actors and their luggage. Leander rose late, as did Zerbina; but while the former tried to look unconcerned, in spite of his pitiful look of suffering, the other was radiant with satisfied ambition. She even went the length of patronising her companions, and, a serious

symptom, the duenna paid her court with a wheedling obsequiousness she had never before exhibited towards her. Scappino, whom nothing ever escaped, remarked that in some mysterious way Zerbina's trunk was twice as heavy as before. Serafina bit her lips and hissed out between her teeth, "The jade!" but the soubrette pretended not to hear her, being temporarily satisfied with the humiliation of the leading lady.

At last the waggon started and they left the hospitable castle of Bruyères, which all save Leander regretted. The Tyrant was thinking of the pistoles he had received; the Pedant, of the excellent wines he had drunk in such quantities; the Swashbuckler, of the applause lavished upon him; Zerbina, of her taffetas, gold necklaces, and other spoils; Sigognac and Isabella thought of their love only, and, satisfied since they were together, did not even turn round to see for the last time in the distance the blue roofs and golden walls of the mansion.

VI

A SNOW EFFECT

THE players, as will be readily understood, were well pleased with the stay they had made at Bruyères, for such luck was not frequent in their wandering life. The Tyrant had portioned out the money, and each one fingered with a pleasant sensation a number of pistoles in pockets that usually were bare as Mother Hubbard's cupboard. Zerbina, radiant with mysterious and restrained delight, took in good part her comrades' jokes about the power of her charms. She was triumphant, and it made Serafina madder than ever. Leander alone, still sore from the nocturnal thrashing he had received, failed to share the general joy, and his smile was affected and forced. His gestures were constrained, and every jolt of the waggon drew from him a significant grimace. Whenever he thought himself unobserved, he would rub his shoulders and arms, a concealed manœuvre that escaped the attention of the other players, but could not deceive the sly curiosity of Scappino, ever on the watch for

mishaps that might befall Leander, whose conceit was particularly obnoxious to him.

The wheel of the waggon bumping against a large stone which the driver had failed to notice drew from the gallant an exclamation of pain, and straightway Scappino entered into conversation with him on pretence of sympathising with him.

"My poor Leander, what is the matter with you that you go on groaning and moaning in that way? You seem to be as sore as the Knight of the Sad Countenance after he had cut so many capers, without any clothes on, in the Sierra Morena, by way of performing a lover's penance after the fashion of Amadis on Poverty Rock. So sunken are your eyes, and wan and sickly your face one would think your bed had been made of crossed bludgeons, instead of a soft mattress, with a counterpane, pillows, and bolster, which, after all, are better suited to rest sore limbs. I should judge that Morpheus did not visit you last night."

"Morpheus may have remained in his grot, but the little god Cupid is a prowler who needs no lantern to find his way to a door in a passage," replied Leander, endeavouring to throw his enemy off the scent.

"I am only a comedy valet and know nothing of love

affairs. I have never paid court to fine ladies, but I do know enough to be aware that the little god Cupid, if poets and writers of romances are to be believed, uses his arrows, and not the wood of his bow to smite those he desires to wound."

"What do you mean?" broke in Leander, uneasy at the turn Scappino's mythological subtleties and deductions were giving to the conversation.

"Nothing, except that you have on your neck, a little above the collar-bone, a black mark that will be blue to-morrow, green the next day, and then yellow until the place regains its natural colour. That mark is devilishly like a genuine blow of a stick upon calf-skin, or vellum, if you prefer that."

"No doubt," said Leander, who, previously pale, had now blushed to his ears, "some fair dead beauty, who was in love with me during her life, kissed me in my dreams while I was asleep. Every one knows that the kisses of the dead make marks on the skin that amaze one on waking."

"Your defunct and ghostly beauty comes in the nick of time," retorted Scappino; "but I could have sworn that so vigorous a kiss had been bestowed by a pair of green-oak lips."

"You motley fool and zany, you," returned Leander; "you drive my modesty into a corner. I chastely credit the dead with what might with better right be claimed by the living. Unlearned and rustic though you affect to be, you have surely heard tell of pretty marks, spots, bruises, and bites, that are remembrances of the mad sport of lovers?"

"*Memoram dente notam*," interrupted the Pedant, quite pleased at having an opportunity of quoting Horace.

"Your explanation strikes me as judicious," answered Scappino, "and it is supported by sound authorities. Yet the mark is so long that your nocturnal beauty, whether dead or alive, must have possessed the single tooth the Gorgons were in the habit of passing on to each other in turn."

Leander, mad with fury, tried to get at Scappino to thrash him, but the soreness left by the bastinado on his bruised ribs and his back striped like a zebra's skin was so keen that he had perforce to sit down again and to postpone his vengeance until a more favourable time. The Tyrant and the Pedant, well used to the quarrels between the pair, insisted upon their becoming reconciled. Scappino promised never again to allude to such matters.

"I will exclude from my speech," said he, "any reference to wood in any shape or form whatever, whether in the rough, in balks, in planks, or in bludgeons."

During this absurd altercation, the waggon had been going on, and soon reached four cross-roads, the meeting of them being marked by a turfed mound on which rose a rough wooden cross, cracked by the sun and rain: on it was placed a figure of Christ, one of the arms of which had parted company with the body and, held by a rusty nail only, hung down in sinister fashion.

A group of two men and three mules had pulled up there and was apparently awaiting the coming of some one. One of the mules, as though impatient at having to stand, shook its head covered with pompons and tufts of all colours, with a silvery tinkling of bells. Although embroidered leather blinkers prevented its seeing to the right or to the left, it had smelled the approach of the waggon; the working of its long ears denoted its restless curiosity, and its upturned lips showed its grinning teeth.

"The bell-mule is wagging her ears and grinning," said one of the men. "The waggon cannot be far off now."

And as he spoke the waggon reached the cross-roads.

Zerbina, seated in front, cast a quick glance at the men and animals and seemed in no wise surprised at their presence in that spot.

"By the gods! that is a stylish equipage," cried the Tyrant. "These Spanish mules are fit to travel fifty or sixty miles a day, and if we had such steeds we should soon reach Paris. But who the devil are they waiting for? No doubt it is a relay prepared for some nobleman."

"No," put in the duenna. "The mule is equipped with cushions and blankets, as if for a lady's use."

"Then," said the Tyrant, "it is a case of carrying off a lady, for the two equerries in gray livery look uncommonly mysterious."

"You may be right," said Zerbina, with a strange smile.

"Can the lady be in our party?" said Scappino. "I see one of the equerries coming this way as if he desired to parley before resorting to force."

"There will be no need of that," interjected Serafina, casting at the same time upon the soubrette a glance of contempt which the latter stood with quiet impudence. "There are good-natured people who drop of themselves into a ravisher's arms."

"It is not every one gets the chance to be carried off," snapped back the maid. "It is not enough to want to be; you have to be attractive into the bargain."

The conversation had reached this point when the equerry, signing to the driver to pull up, asked, cap in hand, whether Miss Zerbina were in the waggon.

Zerbina, quick as a flash, put her small brown face out from under the awning, replied herself to the question, and sprang to the ground.

"I am at your orders, Miss," said the equerry in respectful tones.

The maid shook out her skirts, slipped her finger round the front of her corsage, as if to free her bosom, and turning towards the players addressed them as follows in the most deliberate fashion: —

"Forgive me, my dear comrades, if I leave you thus. Sometimes opportunity compels you to grasp it by offering its lock to you, and this so conveniently that it would be downright folly not to clutch it with both hands, for when the chance is once lost it never again returns. Fortune, which until now had frowned, is now smiling graciously upon me, and I am going to profit by its kindly disposition, especially as it may not

last long. In my humble part of a soubrette, I could aspire to Mascarilles or Scappinos only. The valets alone paid court to me, while their masters made love to Lucindas, Leonoras, and Isabellas. Scarcely did these noble gentlemen deign to chuck me under the chin and to add a kiss on my cheek to the gold they slipped into the pocket of my apron. Now it has come to pass that a man of better taste has come to the conclusion that off the boards the maid is as good as the mistress, and as my part does not call for particularly rigorous virtue, I, in my turn, have come to the conclusion that I ought not to grieve the dear man who was so sorry to see me go. Therefore I will, if you please, remove my trunks from the waggon and bid you all farewell. I shall join you in Paris one of these days, for I am actress first and last, and I have never been long unfaithful to the stage."

The men laid hold of Zerbina's boxes, and loaded them upon the transport mule, taking care to even the weight on either side. The maid, assisted by the equerry, sprang on to the bell-mule as lightly as if she had studied horsemanship in a riding-school, then rapping the animal's flank with her heel, she went off making a farewell gesture to her comrades.

"Good luck to you, Zerbina," cried all the players, save and except Serafina, who felt bitterly towards her.

"I am sorry to see her go," said the Tyrant; "I should have liked to keep her with us, for she is an excellent soubrette; but she was bound to us by her fancy only. We shall have to change the maid's parts in our plays and adapt them to duennas or chaperons, who are not as attractive as a saucy face; but dame Leonardo can be very funny, and, besides, is a consummate actress. We shall manage somehow."

The waggon started at a livelier gait than the ox-cart had been wont to do. The country it was traversing contrasted with the appearance of the moors; the white sand had been replaced by red soil that afforded more nourishment to the vegetation. Houses built of stone, and testifying to a certain amount of comfort, showed here and there in the midst of gardens surrounded by quickset hedges that had already lost their leaves, but on which glowed wild haws and sloes. Along the sides of the road, well grown trees shot up, their trunks vigorous and their limbs stout; their yellow leaves covered the ground around them or were blown by the breeze about Isabella and Sigognac, who, tiring of the constrained attitude they were compelled

to adopt in the waggon, rested themselves by walking along for a time. The Swashbuckler had gone on ahead, his thin figure, that seemed spitted upon his rapier, standing out dark against the flaming sunset on the top of the rise.

"How comes it," said Sigognac to Isabella, as they walked on, "that you, who, in the modesty of your behaviour, the soundness of your remarks, and the choice of your words, exhibit all the characteristics of a high-born girl, have attached yourself to this company of strolling players, who, worthy though they are, yet belong to a different station in life?"

"Do not take me," returned Isabella, "because I happen to have some breeding, for an unfortunate princess or queen driven from her realms, and compelled to earn her living on the stage. My story is a very simple one, and since you are interested in it, I shall tell it you. Far from having been reduced to my present condition by reverses of fate, unexpected disasters, or romantic adventures, I was born in it, being, as the saying is, a child of the stage. The car of Thespis was my birth-place and my travelling fatherland. My mother, who played the parts of queens in tragedies, was a very beautiful woman. She took her parts

seriously, and even off the boards would heed none but kings, princes, dukes, and such great personages, looking upon her tinsel crowns and gilded sceptres as genuine. When she used to come off the stage into the wings, she swept along so majestically in her imitation-velvet robes that they looked like a train of purple or a long drawn out royal mantle. Her pride made her refuse to listen to the avowals, prayers, and pledges of the sparks who are always fluttering round actresses like moths round a candle. One evening, indeed, in her dressing-room, when a young fop attempted to take liberties with her, she rose, drew herself up like a real Thomyris, Queen of Scythia, and called out, 'Seize him, guards!' in so regal, contemptuous, and solemn tone, that the gallant, very much abashed, fairly bolted, afraid of pressing his suit. Now this pride of hers and her fashion of repelling would-be lovers, so unusual in a profession ever accounted of easy morals, having come to the ears of a very high and mighty prince, struck him as being in very good taste, and it appeared to him that such disdain of the profane crowd could spring only from a noble mind. As his rank in the world was equivalent to that of a tragedy queen, he was received more

pleasantly and with a gentler smile. He was young, handsome, of good address, passionate, and had the great advantage of being a nobleman. Need I say more? This time the queen did not summon her guards, and you see in me the fruit of that love."

"That," gallantly replied Sigognac, "explains the incomparable grace you possess; princely blood flows in your veins; I had almost guessed it."

"This connection," continued Isabella, "lasted longer than is the wont of such affairs in our profession. The Prince found my mother remained faithful to him, as much from pride as from love, it is true, but her fidelity never wavered. Unfortunately, reasons of State compelled him to go off to the wars and to proceed on embassies to distant countries. A match, which he put off as long as he could, was arranged in his name by his family with a lady of very high rank, and he finally had to yield, for he had not the right to break, for the sake of an amorous caprice, the long line of ancestors that went back to Charlemagne, and to cause his race to die with him. Large sums were offered to my mother for the purpose of softening a separation that had become inevitable, and also to preserve her from want and enable her to bring me up and educate

me. But she would not accept anything, saying that she could not take the money when the heart was no longer hers, and that she would rather the Prince were indebted to her than she to him, for, with extreme generosity, she had bestowed upon him what he could never restore to her. 'Not to be bought, either before or after,' was her motto. So she continued to play her parts of tragedy queens, though with a broken heart, and languished on until her death, which occurred not long afterwards. I was then a child seven or eight years of age, and filled the parts of children, Cupids, and such others as were fitted to my age and intelligence. My mother's death caused me grief beyond that natural to my years, and I remember I had to be whipped that day to compel me to play the part of one of Medea's children. Then my great sorrow was gradually lulled by the gentle arts of the actors and actresses, who rivalled each other in petting me, never omitting to put some sweets into my little basket. The Pedant, who was a member of our company, and who seemed to me even then as aged and wrinkled as he looks now, became interested in me, taught me the harmony and rhythm of verse and the way of reciting it, how to speak and how to listen,

what attitudes and gestures to adopt, how to harmonise my expression with the particular situation, in a word, all the secrets of the art of which he is a master, although he is only a strolling player; for he was once master of a school, and was dismissed on account of his being an irreclaimable drunkard. Amid the apparent disorders of a vagabond life, I have lived innocent and chaste; for to my companions, who had known me from my birth, I was a sister or a daughter, and to fops I turned a cold, reserved, discreet mien that has kept them at a distance and has enabled me to continue off the boards, as was proper, my part of an ingenuous maiden without hypocrisy or assumed modesty."

Thus, as they walked on, did Isabella relate to the delighted Sigognac the story of her life and adventures.

"Do you remember, or have you forgotten, the name of the nobleman?" asked he.

"It might be unwise to mention it," replied Isabella, "but it is engraved in my memory."

"Is there any proof of his connection with your mother?"

"I possess a seal engraved with his arms," said Isabella, "which is the only gift of his my mother would keep, its beauty and heraldic meaning surpassing its

mere pecuniary worth. I shall show it to you some day, if you like."

It would be tiresome to follow the waggon stage by stage, the more so that the company did not journey far every day and that there were no incidents worth remembering. So I shall pass over some time and bring the players to the vicinity of Poictiers. Business had not proved remunerative and dark days had fallen upon the company. The money received from the Marquis de Bruyères had been all spent, as well as Sigognac's pistoles, for his kindness of heart compelled him to aid his distressed companions to the utmost of his power. The waggon, that had started with four strong animals, was now drawn by one steed, and such a steed! a poor brute that seemed to have been fed on barrel-hoops instead of oats and hay, so prominent were its ribs. Its bones showed through the skin, the relaxed muscles on its legs formed long flabby wrinkles, and spavins swelled its hairy hocks. Its withers, under the pressure of a collar from which all the stuffing had vanished, were covered with raw sores, and its thin flanks were rayed with the marks of the whiplash. Its face was an incarnation of melancholy and suffering; behind its eyes were sunken salt-cellars that might have

been hollowed out with a dissecting knife; its blue eyes were filled with the dull, resigned, pensive expression of an overdriven animal; one could read in them sad indifference to blows, the result of useless efforts, and the crack of the lash failed to awaken an answering spark. Its limp ears, one of which had been split open, hung pitifully on either side its face and kept time by their flapping to the irregular rhythm of its gait. A wisp of hair, formerly white, but now yellow, stuck in the headstall, the leather of which rubbed on the bony cheekbones, brought out the more strongly by the poor brute's lean condition. From the nostrils dropped the sweat of its difficult breathing, while the tired lips hung down as if it were sulking.

Perspiration had marked its white coat, dappled with bay, with lines like those made by rain upon plastered walls, made the hair under its belly stick together, washed its lower limbs and mingled hideously with the mud. Most pitiable was it to look at, and the pale horse on which Death is represented as riding in Revelation, would have appeared like a spirited steed, fit to parade in a joust, by the side of this worn and exhausted animal whose shoulders seemed to give way at every step, and whose sorrowful glance begged the

favour of speedy death at the knacker's hands. The temperature was falling and it plodded on in a cloud of vapour that rose from its flanks and nostrils.

The three women only were in the waggon, the men walking in order not to overload the poor brute, with whose pace they could easily keep up, and which indeed they could readily distance. As none had any pleasant suggestions to make, they were all silent and walked apart, wrapping themselves in their cloaks as closely as they could.

Sigognac, almost discouraged, was wondering whether he would not have done better to remain in his ancestral home, ruined as it was, and to run the risk of starving to death in it by the side of his damaged escutcheon, in solitude and silence, than to be taking the chances of the road with strollers as he was actually doing. He thought of good old Peter, of Bayard, of Miraut, and of Beelzebub, the trusted companions of his long, weary hours, and in spite of himself his heart sank within him, and a nervous gasp, that usually ends in tears, choked him for a moment; but a glance at Isabella, huddled in her cloak and sitting on the front of the vehicle, renewed his courage. The young girl smiled at him; she did not appear to mind the wretch-

edness of their situation; her heart was happy, so what mattered bodily suffering and fatigue?

The landscape itself was not calculated to dispel gloomy thoughts. In the foreground grew the twisted trunks of a number of old storm-beaten, distorted elms, their tops broken off, their network of black branches standing out against a lowering, yellowish-gray sky, threatening snow and shedding a livid light. In the middle distance, stretched an uncultivated plain, bounded by bare hills and russet woods. Here and there a hut, from which rose a faint wisp of smoke, showed like a chalkmark between the pole-fences. The ground was cut by the channel of a brook that formed a sort of cicatrice. In springtime, and clothed with verdure, the country would no doubt have looked attractive, but in winter's gray livery it was monotonous, dismal, and wretched. From time to time went by a wan and ragged peasant or old woman, bending under a faggot of dead wood; yet far from giving life to the waste, they merely deepened the feeling of loneliness. Magpies, hopping about on the brown earth with their fan-like tails outspread, seemed to be the real inhabitants of the region; they chattered as the waggon drew near as though they were passing remarks upon it, accom-

panying their twittering with derisive dances in front of the players, like wicked birds that they were, hardened against the sufferings of the wretched travellers.

A bitter wind was blowing, biting the faces of the strollers and whipping their cloaks about them. The gusts of wind were soon accompanied by flakes of snow that rose and fell and mingled, without settling on anything, so violent were the blasts. The snow was so thick that at a short distance in front of the blinded wayfarers it looked like a white darkness, the silvery mist transforming the appearance of the nearest objects, that soon ceased to be distinguishable.

"The old lady above must be plucking geese and shaking the feathers down upon us," said the Pedant, who was tramping on behind the waggon for shelter. "I should greatly prefer their flesh to their plumage, and I could eat it without lemon or spices."

"Yea, even without salt," answered the Tyrant, "for my stomach has wholly lost remembrance of the omelet made with eggs that chirped as they were being broken, and which I disposed of under the fallacious and sarcastic name of breakfast, in spite of the beaks that bristled in it."

Sigognac also had taken refuge behind the vehicle, and the Pedant turned to him, saying: —

"This is frightful weather, Baron, and for your sake I am sorry that you should be sharing our wretched plight, but it is only a passing misfortune, and although we are not making much progress, nevertheless we are drawing nearer to Paris."

"I was not nurtured in the lap of luxury," returned Sigognac, "and a few flakes of snow do not appal me. It is these poor ladies whom I pity, for in spite of their feebler strength they are compelled to bear with privations and fatigue like old travellers."

"They have long been used to it, and what would be painful to ladies of rank or to townswomen does not particularly incommode them."

The storm was now increasing; driven by the gale the snow was drifting in clouds along the ground, stopping only when it met with some obstacle, such as a mound, a stone wall, a hedge, or a ditch. Then it would heap itself up with amazing rapidity, and speedily overflow on the other side of the temporary dike. At other times it was caught in the whirl of an eddy and curled up heavenwards to fall at once in heavy masses immediately blown away by the wind. In a few

moments Isabella, Serafina, and dame Leonardo, though they had bestowed themselves in the most sheltered part of the waggon and were protected by the luggage under the flapping awning, were dusted all over with snow.

Bewildered by the driving snow and wind, the poor horse could scarcely make way against the blast; it panted hard, its flanks heaved, and it slipped at every step. The Tyrant caught hold of the bridle, and walking alongside of it, helped it along, while the Pedant, Sigognac, and Scappino pushed at the wheels, Leander meanwhile cracking the whip, to urge on the animal; as for striking it, that would have been unmitigated cruelty. The Swashbuckler had fallen behind, for he was such a light-weight, thanks to his phenomenal leanness, that the wind prevented his pushing on, although he had endeavoured to ballast himself with stones in his pockets and in each of his hands.

The snowstorm, instead of diminishing, was growing wilder and wilder, and blew furiously about the innumerable white flakes that were tossed hither and thither like the spume of the sea. It became so violent that the strollers were obliged to come to a stop and to turn the waggon round to leeward, anxious though they were

to reach the village. The poor horse was done; its legs were growing stiff, and its smoking, perspiring coat was ruffled by shivers. If it had been called upon to make another attempt, it must have fallen dead; indeed a drop of blood was already showing on its nostrils widely dilated by its hard breathing, and its eyes were becoming glazed.

It is easy enough to fancy the darkness full of terrors, for it readily inspires dread, but the horror of whiteness is less intelligible. Nevertheless, nothing could well be more sinister than the situation of the poor players, pale with hunger, blue with cold, blinded by the snow, and lost on the high-road in the mad whirl of icy particles that enshrouded them. The whole company had snuggled under the awning of the waggon until the squall should blow over, and pressed close to one another so as to keep as warm as possible.

At last the storm broke, and the snow, so long whirled through the air, was able to fall less tumultuously to the ground. As far as the eye could reach the landscape was covered with a white pall.

"Where is Hector?" queried Blazius. "Can the gale have whipped him off to the moon?"

"Yes, where is he?" added the Tyrant. "I cannot

see anything of him, but perhaps he is lying sheltered under the scenery at the bottom of the waggon. Here, Swashbuckler! Wag your ears if you are asleep and answer to your name."

But never a word did Captain Hector utter, nor did any one move under the heap of old scenery.

"Hallo, Hector!" roared the Tyrant again in his deepest tragedy-voice and with a volume of sound that would have wakened the Seven Sleepers and their dog.

"We have seen nothing of him," said the women; "and as the drifting snow was blinding us, we did not think anything of it, supposing he was close to the waggon."

"The devil!" said Blazius. "That is strange. I hope nothing has happened to him."

"No doubt," put in Sigognac, "he took shelter, when the storm was at its worst, behind the trunk of a tree, and he will soon catch up with us."

It was resolved to wait a few moments, and then, if he did not turn up, to start out in quest of him. Nothing showed on the road, against the white background of which, even though it was now becoming dark, a human form would have been easily perceived at a great distance. Night, which falls so early

during the short December days, had already come on, but it was not quite black. The reflection of the snow diminished the obscurity of the sky, and by a strange opposition, it seemed that the light was produced by the earth. The horizon showed in clear, white lines, and did not vanish in misty distance. The whitened trees resembled the frosty efflorescence on window-panes, and from time to time the flakes of snow shaken down from a branch fell, like the silver tears on palls, upon the black curtain of the darkness. The sight was of the gloomiest; a dog began to howl by way of giving a voice to the desolate landscape and to express its dreadful melancholy. It does seem at times as though nature, tired of remaining mute, confides her secret woes to the moans of the wind or the howl of an animal.

Every one knows how dismal sounds in the silence of night the desperate bark that ends in a rattle and that seems called forth by the passage of ghosts invisible to the human eye. The animal's instinct, communicating with the soul of things, foresees misfortune and bewails it even ere it has happened. Its howl, that is mingled with sobs, has in it the terror of the future, the dread of death, and the horror of the supernatural. The boldest man cannot hear it without a

shudder and, as Job says, it makes the hair of the flesh stand up.

The howling, distant at first, had drawn nearer, and it was now possible to make out in the middle of the plain a great black dog, seated on its haunches, its head lifted to the sky and uttering its lamentable call.

"Something has happened to our poor friend," exclaimed the Tyrant; "that accursed brute is howling as if for the dead."

The women, seized with a presentiment of misfortune, devoutly crossed themselves, and tender-hearted Isabella began repeating a prayer.

"We must set out in search of him without further delay," said Blazius. "And we must take the lantern, so that it may be a beacon and a Polar star to him if he has strayed away off the road and is stumbling about in the fields; for in snowy weather such as this, which covers up the roads with a white pall, it is easy enough to lose one's self."

The flint was struck and the bit of candle in the lantern soon shed a light through the horn panes sufficiently bright to be seen at a distance.

The Tyrant, Blazius, and Sigognac started on the quest, Scappino and Leander remaining behind to guard

the waggon and to reassure the women, who were beginning to get frightened at what had happened. The dog's persistent howling deepened the gloom of the scene, while with a low roaring the wind drove its aerial chariots over the land as if it were bearing away wandering spirits.

The storm had so drifted the snow that all tracks had disappeared, or at least were nearly obliterated. The darkness added to the difficulty of the search, and when Blazius studied the ground in the light of the lantern, he would come upon the vast footprints of the Tyrant, deeply sunk in the snow, but he could not find those of the Swashbuckler, who, even had he managed to progress so far, would have made no deeper imprint than a bird.

They proceeded thus for nearly a mile, lifting the lantern up in order to enable the lost actor to see it, and shouting at the top of their voices, "Hector! Hector! Oh! Hector!"

But there was no response to the cries, which recalled the farewell to the dead which the ancients uttered ere leaving the tomb. Alone the silence was audible, or a frightened bird would fly away with sudden whir of wings and quick call, and disappear

farther away in the darkness, or else the hooting of an owl disturbed by the rays of the lantern sounded dolefully. At last Sigognac, who was very keen-sighted, thought he made out in the obscurity, at the foot of a tree, a curious shape, strangely stiff and dreadfully immobile. He informed his companions, who hastily followed him in that direction.

It was indeed the poor Swashbuckler. He was leaning against the tree and his long legs outstretched on the ground were half buried in a snow-drift. His long rapier, from which he was never parted, formed so comical an angle with his body that it would have provoked laughter at any other time. He lay like a log as his comrades approached, and Blazius, made uneasy by his motionless attitude, flashed the light upon his face and nearly dropped the lantern, so terrified was he at the sight it revealed.

The face the beams illumined had lost the colouring of life; it was waxy white; the nose, pinched in by death's bony fingers, shone like a piece of cuttlefish, and the skin was drawn tight over the temples. Flakes of snow had caught on the eyebrows and eyelashes, the wide-open eyes were fixed in a glassy stare, while at each end of the mustaches hung an icicle that caused

them to droop. The lips from which had flown so many amusing rodomontades were closed with the seal of eternal silence, and the death's-head, carved by emaciation, was already showing under the pale face, in which the custom of making grimaces had drawn horribly comical wrinkles that survived death itself; for it is one of the penalties of the player's profession that even death loses its solemnity in his case.

Still clinging to hope, the Tyrant endeavoured to shake the Swashbuckler's hand, but the arm, already stiff, fell back with a sharp sound like the wooden arm of an automaton when the string is let go. The poor devil had left the stage of this world for that of the next. Yet unable to make up his mind that Captain Hector was really gone, the Tyrant asked Blazius if he had his flask about him. The Pedant never went without it; there were a few drops of wine left in it, and he applied it to the blue lips of the body, but they remained obstinately closed, and the red drops of the cordial filtered out at the corners of the mouth. The vital spark had fled for ever from the frail clay, for the faintest breath would have condensed into vapour in the bitterly cold air.

"Leave the poor fellow alone," said Sigognac. "Do you not see that he is dead?"

"Alas! yes," returned Blazius. "As dead as Cheops under his great pyramid. No doubt he was overcome by the blizzard, and being unable to struggle against the fury of the blast, he stopped by this tree, and thin as he was the cold quickly froze him to the marrow. In order to make a sensation in Paris, he had been eating less and less every day, and he was thinner than a greyhound after the hunting season is over. Poor Hector! you are safe now from all slaps, boxes on the ear, kicks and thrashings which your part required you to put up with. Nobody will ever laugh in your face again!"

"What are we to do with the body?" broke in the Tyrant. "We cannot leave it on top of the ditch to be picked to pieces by wolves, dogs, and birds, even though his flesh be but poor pittance that would scarce serve to feed the worms."

"Of course we cannot leave him," returned Blazius. "He was a true and faithful comrade, and as he is not heavy, you shall take the head, I will take the feet, and the pair of us shall carry him to the waggon. To-morrow, when daylight has returned, we shall bury him

as decently as possible in some corner or other, seeing that our unnatural Mother Church closes the cemetery gates against us poor players and denies us the satisfaction of resting in consecrated ground. After spending our lives in entertaining the godliest people, we have to go and rot on a charnel like dead dogs and horses. Pray take the lantern and walk ahead of us, Baron."

Sigognac nodded assent to the plan. The two players stooped down, cleared away the snow that already covered the Swashbuckler like a pall prematurely outspread, raised the lean corpse that weighed less than a child's body, and started, preceded by the Baron, who lighted the way with the lantern.

Fortunately no one was travelling along that way at the time, for a passer-by would have thought the funereal group, illumined by the wavering, reddish reflection of the lantern, and casting long, misshapen shadows upon the snow, a strange and mysterious sight indeed, and would naturally have concluded that it was a case of crime or witchcraft. The black dog had ceased to howl, as though it had done its duty in giving warning of the death. The silence of the tomb reigned over the land, for snow deadens sound.

Scappino, Leander, and the other players had

caught sight of the little glowing red light swinging in Sigognac's hand and casting upon the surrounding objects sudden flashes that drew them out of the darkness in strange or formidable shapes until they again vanished in the shadows. Seen intermittently in the uncertain light, the figures of the Tyrant and Blazius, connected by the stiffened body of the Swashbuckler, as two words are connected by a hyphen, had a lugubrious and enigmatical appearance. Impelled by anxiety and curiosity, Scappino and Leander started to meet them.

"Well, what is the matter?" said the former when they came up to their comrades. "Is Captain Hector ill that you are carrying him that way, as stiff as if he had swallowed his own rapier?"

"He is not ill," returned Blazius. "He is in the enjoyment of perfect health; neither gout, fever, catarrh, nor the stone can hurt him now. He is cured for ever of the disease for which no physician, whether Hippocrates, Galen, or Avicenna, has ever found a remedy. I mean life, which always ends by killing one."

"So he is dead!" said Scappino, in accents of sorrow and surprise, as he bent over the dead man's face.

"Quite dead; could n't be deader, supposing there

are various degrees of deadness, for to the natural coldness of death is added in his case the coldness of frost," replied Blazius, in a voice that betrayed more emotion than his speech expressed.

"He is no more! as the confidants say at the end of a tragedy," added the Tyrant. "But please relieve us; it is your turn to carry him. We have borne our poor comrade long enough, and without expectation of vails or tips either."

Scappino took the Tyrant's place, Leander that of Blazius, little as he cared for that sort of mortuary job, and the procession started afresh. In a few minutes they reached the waggon, stalled in the road. Isabella and Serafina had, spite of the cold, got out from the vehicle, in which the duenna alone was squatting and opening wide her owl-like eyes. At the sight of the Swashbuckler, white, stiff, frozen, on his features the motionless mask through which the soul no longer looks forth, the actresses uttered a cry of terror and grief. Tears sprang from Isabella's clear eyes and were at once frozen on her cheeks by the bitter night blast. She clasped her lovely hands, reddened by the cold, and a fervent prayer for the repose of the soul of him who had so suddenly vanished through the trap-

door of eternity rose on the wings of faith into the depths of the sombre sky.

What was to be done? The situation was rather embarrassing, the village where the company had intended to spend the night being still four or five miles distant. It was certain that by the time they could reach it every house would long since have been shut up and the inhabitants asleep. On the other hand, it was impossible to remain stuck in the snow in the road without wood to light a fire with, without food to comfort the living, and to await daybreak, which came very late at that season, in the gruesome company of a dead body.

A start was resolved upon, the hour's rest and a feed of oats administered to the poor old worn-out horse by Scappino having restored some strength to the animal, which looked brighter and capable of doing the distance. The body of Captain Hector was placed in the bottom of the waggon and covered with a cloth. The actresses, shivering a little with fright, placed themselves in the front part; for death turns the friend with whom one was but now chatting into a spectre, and he who had been entertaining now terrifies as might a hobgoblin or a bogy.

The men tramped on foot, Scappino lighting the way with the lantern, into which a fresh candle had been put, and the Tyrant holding the horse's bridle to prevent its stumbling. They did not make very rapid progress, for the going was bad; nevertheless, in the course of a couple of hours they made out, at the foot of a steep hill, the outer houses of the village. The snow that covered the roofs made them stand out against the sombre background of sky in spite of the darkness. The alert watch-dogs, hearing in the distance the clanking of the iron-work of the waggon, bayed loudly, and their barking awoke other dogs in the isolated farms afar off. This produced a concert of howls, some low, some shrill, with solos, responses, and choruses, in which the entire canine population of the countryside took part, so that when the waggon reached the village the whole place was up and awake. More than one night-capped head showed in the windows or the upper panels of half-open doors, making it easier for the Pedant to carry on negotiations tending to secure lodging for the company.

He was told where the inn stood, or at least the house which did duty as an inn, for travellers did not frequent the place, being accustomed to push on farther.

It was at the other end of the village, and the poor horse had to buckle to it again; but it smelt the stable and with a tremendous effort it struck sparks from the stones through the snow.

The place could not be mistaken; a holly-bush hung over the door, not unlike the boughs that dip into lustral waters, and Scappino, raising his lantern, made sure of the presence of the symbol of hospitality. The Tyrant drummed on the door with his big fists, and soon the clatter of pattens descending the stairs was heard within. A ray of reddish light filtered through the cracks of the door, which opened and exhibited, in all the repulsiveness of a most unattractive *négligé*, an old woman whose withered hand, shading the trembling flame of a penny dip, seemed to be catching fire. She showed the players into the kitchen, placed the candle upon the table, stirred up the ashes on the hearth to start a few glowing cinders that soon set fire to a handful of brushwood, and then returned to her room to put on a skirt and jacket. A stout lad, rubbing his eyes with his dirty hands, opened the gates of the yard, drove in the waggon, unharnessed the horse, and stabled it.

"Look here," said Blazius, "we cannot leave poor

Hector in the waggon like a dead deer after a day's hunting. The dogs would be sure to get at him. After all, he received Christian baptism, and he deserves to be waked like the good Christian that he was."

The body of the dead comedian was therefore brought in, stretched upon the table and respectfully covered with a cloak. Under the great folds of the stuff showed the stiff lines of the body and the sharp profile of the face, that was even more terrifying thus than when it was uncovered. The consequence was that when the old hostess entered the room she nearly fainted with terror at the sight of the corpse, which she took for that of a man murdered by the players. Holding out her trembling old hands, she besought the Tyrant, whom she looked upon as the leader of the band, not to put her to death, promising to maintain absolute secrecy, even were she to be tortured. Isabella reassured her, and told her briefly what had happened. The old woman then fetched a couple more candles, and placed them symmetrically round the corpse, offering to watch the dead with dame Leonardo, for she had often prepared the village dead for burial and knew what needed to be done on such sad occasions.

These matters settled, the players withdrew to an-

other room, where they made a pretence of supping, for the lugubrious scenes they had just taken part in and the death of the worthy Hector were not calculated to give them an appetite. Probably for the first time in his life, Blazius, good as the wine was, left his glass half-full, having forgotten to drink it down. He must certainly have been deeply afflicted, for he was of the breed of wine-bibbers that ask to be buried under a barrel so that the spigot may drip into their mouths, and he would have risen in his coffin to answer the call of "A bumper, and no heel-taps!"

Isabella and Serafina had a cot in the neighbouring room; the men lay down upon bundles of straw brought in by the stable-boy, but every one slept badly and was up betimes, for the Swashbuckler had to be buried.

For lack of a sheet, Leonardo and the hostess had made a shroud for him out of a piece of an old drop-scene, representing a forest; a winding-sheet worthy of an actor, as is a military cloak of a warrior. A few traces of green paint on the threadbare canvas simulated wreaths and foliage, and looked like armfuls of grass cast upon it in honour of the corpse that was bundled and sewn up into the shape of an Egyptian mummy.

The bier was formed of a plank placed upon two stretchers, the ends of which were taken by the Tyrant, Blazius, Scappino, and Leander. A long, black, velvet robe, covered with spangle-stars and half-moons, and which was used for the costumes of pontiffs and necromancers, made a fairly decent pall.

In this order the procession went out by a back door opening out upon the fields, in order to avoid the attention and the remarks of the curious-minded, and proceeded towards a piece of waste ground which the hostess had pointed out as a place where the Swashbuckler might be buried without any one objecting, for it was the spot where animals that had died of disease were thrown. No doubt it was a most unfit place for the interment of a human being, but the canons of the Church were plain, and a player, being excommunicated, could not rest in consecrated ground unless he had given up the stage, its works and its pomps, which certainly was not the case with Captain Hector.

Gray-eyed Morn was just awakening and was coming down the slope of the hills in the snow. A cold light fell upon the plain, the whiteness of which made the pale tones of the heavens look livid. Surprised at the strange appearance of the procession, unaccom-

panied by cross or priest, a few peasants, on their way to pick up fallen branches, stopped and looked askance at the strollers, suspecting them to be heretics, sorcerers, or Calvinists, yet not daring to interfere. At last a fairly open spot was reached, and the stable-boy, who carried the spade with which the grave was to be dug, said it would be well to stop there. The ground was strewn with carcasses of animals half-covered with snow; skeletons of horses, picked clean by the vultures and the crows, stretched out their long fleshless heads with empty sockets, and the vertebræ of their necks; their ribs, bare as bare could be, opening out like the leaves of a fan the paper of which has been torn away. Touches of snow fantastically fallen increased still more the horror of the charnel by bringing out the projections and the articulations of the bones. It seemed like a collection of the chimerical animals which harpies and ghouls bestride in the cavalcades of the witches' sabbaths.

The players laid the body on the ground, and the stable-boy began to dig vigorously, throwing the spadefuls of black earth upon the snow, — a peculiarly repellent performance, for the living cannot help thinking that the dead, though past all feeling, must be colder

under the layer of frost which is to cover them on their first night in the grave.

The Tyrant took turns with the lad, and the grave was being rapidly dug. It yawned already sufficiently wide to swallow the poor body at a mouthful, when the peasantry, who had drawn near, began to yell "Huguenots!" and seemed about to assault the players. They even threw a few stones, which, happily, hit no one. Seized with anger against the rabble, Sigognac flashed out his sword and fell upon the rascals, striking them with the flat and threatening them with the point. Hearing the row, the Tyrant sprang from the grave, caught hold of one of the stretchers, and laid on handsomely upon the backs of those overthrown by the Baron's impetuous charge. The band scattered with howls and curses, and the obsequies of poor Hector were concluded.

Lying at the bottom of the hole, the corpse, sewn up in the piece of forest scenery, looked more like an arquebuse wrapped in green serge and buried for concealment than like a human body committed to its last resting-place. When the first shovelfuls of earth fell upon the poor remains of the dead actor, the Pedant, unable to master his emotion and to keep back a

tear that rolled down his red nose and fell into the grave like a pearl of the heart, uttered in a doleful voice by way of funeral discourse, "Alas! poor Hector!" And this was the dirge and threnody of the deceased.

The worthy Pedant, as he spoke the words, did not suspect that he was repeating the very words of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, as he addressed the skull of Yorick, the former court-jester, as may be seen in Master William Shakespeare's tragedy, a poet well known in England and patronised by Queen Elizabeth.

In a few minutes the grave was filled up; the Tyrant spread snow over it, to conceal the spot and prevent any outrage being perpetrated upon the body. This done —

"Now," he said, "let us be off smartly; there is nothing more we can do here. Back to the inn, and let us away as fast as we may, for the rascals, returning in greater numbers, might attack us. Neither your sword nor my fists would suffice to defend our party, for a host of pygmies can overcome a giant. Victory itself would be inglorious and profitless, for even were you to dispose of half a dozen of these louts, your glory would not grow thereby and the killing of the

fellows would get us into trouble. We should have the wailing of widows and the howls of children, a wearisome and pitiful performance that lawyers turn to account to influence the judges."

The advice was sound and it was followed. An hour later, the bill having been settled, the waggon had started again.

VII

WHICH JUSTIFIES THE TITLE OF THIS NOVEL

AT first the company proceeded as rapidly as the strength of the horse, refreshed by a good feed and a night spent in the stable, and the condition of the road covered with new-fallen snow allowed. The peasants manhandled by Sigognac and the Tyrant, might attack the party in greater numbers, and it was desirable to get sufficiently far from the village to render pursuit useless. So some six miles were travelled in silence, for the sad end of the Swashbuckler added sombre thoughts to the melancholy situation. Every one reflected that it might be his or her fate some day to be buried like that by the roadside, among dead animals, and given over to profanation. The waggon pursuing its way was symbolical of life, that ever goes on without troubling about those who cannot follow and fall dying or dead in the

ditches. But the symbol brought out more vividly the hidden meaning, and Blazius, whose tongue was itching to talk, began to moralise on this theme with endless quotations, apothegms, and maxims with which he had stored his memory as he learned his parts.

The Tyrant listened to him without uttering a word and with a preoccupied look. His thoughts were running in another channel, and Blazius at last noticed his comrade's anxious expression and asked him what he was thinking of.

"I am thinking," replied the Tyrant, "of Milo of Croton, who killed an ox with one blow of his fist, and ate up the animal in a single day. I feel capable of repeating the feat, in which I much delight."

"Unfortunately we have not got the ox," put in Scappino, taking part in the conversation.

"True," returned the Tyrant. "I have but the fist — and the appetite. Oh! happy the ostrich that feeds on pebbles, pieces of broken glass, gaiter-buttons, knife-handles, belt-buckles, and other victuals indigestible by man. At this present moment I could swallow every one of our stage properties. I feel as if while digging poor Hector's grave I dug one within myself, so deep, so long, and so wide that it can never be filled

up. Wise indeed were the ancients who followed up funerals with repasts plentifully furnished with viands and copiously watered with wine, to the greater glory of the dead and the improvement of the health of the living. I should love to perform even now that philosophical rite so well fitted to dry our tears."

"In other words," said Blazius, "you would like to eat. You Polyphemus, you ogre, you Gargantua, you Gouliaf, you disgust me."

"You," retorted the Tyrant, "would mighty well like to drink. You sand-pit, you funnel, you wine-skin, you barrel, you siphon, you hogshead, you excite my pity."

"How delightful would a combination of these two principles prove at table!" said Scappino, conciliatingly. "Here is by the roadside a clump of wood admirably adapted to a halt. We might turn the waggon in there, and if there be any food left, we might eat it, such as it is, sheltered from the north wind by that natural screen. The stop will give the horse time to rest and us to discuss, while nibbling our crusts, the future of our company, a future that strikes me as pretty dark at this moment."

"Wisely spoken, friend Scappino," returned the

Pedant. "We shall draw from the depths of the provision bag, which, alas! is flabbier and more limp than a prodigal's purse, a few remains of the good cheer of other days; the crust of pasties, a ham-bone, the skins of sausages, and crusts of bread. In the box there are left two or three flagons of wine, the last of a valiant company. With the help of these we may, not satisfy, but at least fool our hunger. Pity 't is that the soil of this inhospitable district is not like the clay that certain American Indians ballast themselves with when both hunting and fishing have proved a failure!"

The waggon was driven off the road into the thicket, and the horse, having been unharnessed, sought under the snow for scanty blades of grass it nibbled with its long yellow teeth. A carpet was spread upon an open space, the players sat down round this improvised table-cloth in Turkish fashion, and Blazius placed upon it in due order the remains of former meals that he had brought along in the waggon, as solemnly as if he were setting out a regular feast.

"Admirably done!" exclaimed the Tyrant, delighted at the sight. "A prince's majordomo could not have done better. Although you are wonderful as a Pedant, Blazius, your real vocation was that of steward."

"Such was my ambition, I own, but adverse fortune came in the way," returned the Pedant in modest tones. "I particularly recommend you, my dear hungry friends, not to fall to like gluttons. Masticate slowly and devoutly. For the matter of that, I shall myself divide the rations among you, as is done on rafts after a shipwreck. To you, Tyrant, I assign this ham-bone, from which still depends a morsel of meat. With your strong teeth you can break it and in philosophical fashion extract the marrow from it. Your share, ladies, shall be this bottom crust of the pasty, overlaid with dressing in the corners and internally fortified with a layer of bacon; it is a delicate, savoury dish, so nutritious that you will not care for anything more after it. This butt-end of a sausage is for you, Baron de Sigognac; only you must be careful not to swallow the string which fastens the skin after the manner of purse-strings. You must lay it aside for supper; for dinner is an indigestible, abusive, and superfluous meal which is hereby suppressed. Leander, Scappino, and I will make shift with this venerable piece of cheese, as hairy as a hermit in his grot. As for the bread, those who find it too hard may soak it in water and extract the straws from it if they want tooth-picks. In regard

to the wine, each member of the company is entitled to one glass, and as cellarer, I have to insist on no heel-taps, so that there may be no loss of liquor."

Sigognac had long been inured to more than Spanish frugality, and in his Tower of Hunger had made many a meal which left no crumbs for the mice to nibble, seeing he was the chief mouse in person. Nevertheless, he could not help admiring the bright temper and the comic spirit of the Pedant, who found food for fun under circumstances in which other men would have bemoaned their hard fate and wept over it. But he was worried about Isabella; a deadly pallor overspread her cheeks, and her teeth chattered as she ate with a feverish clanking she in vain endeavoured to repress. Her thin clothing ill-protected her against the bitter cold, and Sigognac, seated by her side, threw round her shoulders, in spite of her protestations, the half of his cloak, and drew her close to himself, so that the warmth of his own body should cheer and revive her. Isabella warmed up quickly by her lover's side, and a faint flush reappeared on her modest features.

While the strollers were eating a curious sound was heard, to which at first no attention was paid, as it was supposed to be caused by the wind whistling through

the bare branches of the coppice. Soon it became more distinct; it was a sort of hoarse and strident rattle, at once stupid and angry, the character of which it was difficult to determine. The women exhibited signs of alarm.

"It may be an adder!" exclaimed Serafina. "I shall die of fright, for those horrid creatures terrify me."

"Serpents are benumbed in such weather," replied Leander, "and sleep sound as logs in their holes."

"Leander is right," put in the Pedant. "It must be something else; some wild animal disturbed by our presence here. There is no reason why it should spoil our meal."

At the sound of the hissing, Scappino had pricked up his foxy ears, which though reddened by the cold had lost none of their acuteness of hearing, and he cast a piercing glance in the direction from which the noise came. The grass was disturbed as by the passage of an animal. Scappino signed to the players to remain still, and presently there emerged from the thicket a superb gander, with neck outstretched, head up, and waddling along with majestic stupidity upon its broad-webbed feet. Two geese, its wives, followed it trustfully and confidingly.

"There is a roast coming to the spit of its own accord," whispered Scappino. "Heaven, touched by our agony of hunger, has sent it to us most timeously."

The clever rascal rose and moved away from the rest of the company, describing a semicircle so lightly that the snow did not even creak under his steps. The gander's attention was attracted by the group of players that it watched with mistrustful curiosity, the reason of their presence in a place ordinarily deserted not being quite clear to its unintelligent brain. Seeing that the bird was absorbed in its contemplation, the player, who apparently was used to marauding, stole up behind the gander and covered it up with his cloak so accurately, skilfully, and quickly that the business was done in less time than it takes to tell it.

Having secured the fowl, he sprang upon it and seized it by the neck under the cloak, which the flapping of the wings of the poor suffocated bird speedily threw off. In this attitude Scappino resembled that much admired group of antique sculpture called "The Boy and the Goose." Soon the choking gander ceased to struggle; its head fell limp upon Scappino's closed fist; its wings no longer flapped; its legs, with their orange-morocco gaiters, stretched out in a dying

kick; it was no more. The widowed geese, dreading a like fate, uttered by way of funeral dirge a lamentable quack and fled into the coppice.

"Well done, Scappino! a clever trick, by my faith, and worth more than all those you play on the stage. Geese are more difficult to fool than Gérontes and Truffaldinis, being naturally very vigilant and constantly on the alert, as we learn in history, which teaches us that the geese of the Capitol scented the night attack of the Gauls and thus saved Rome. This noble gander saves us also in another, but no less providential fashion."

Dame Leonardo bled and plucked the fowl, and while she was doing her best to remove the down, Blazius, the Tyrant, and Leander, scattered in the thickets, collected dead wood, shook off the snow from it and heaped it up in a dry spot. Meantime Scappino was busy cutting a wand with his knife and stripping off the bark, so as to make it into a spit. Two forked sticks, cut above the knot, were driven into the ground to serve as supports and andirons. With the help of a handful of straw taken from the chariot and on which the flint and steel was struck, the fire was speedily lighted and soon blazed merrily, colouring the spitted

bird with its flame and restoring by its vivifying warmth the company seated in a circle round the hearth.

Scappino, with the modest look of a man who feels that he is the hero of the hour, stood in his place, with downcast eyes and devout face, turning the bird from time to time as, under the influence of the glowing coals, it assumed a fine golden colour, most appetising to behold, and gave forth a scent so succulent that it would have caused Cataligirone, who, in the whole extent of the fair city of Paris, admired nothing so much as the cook-shops of the Rue aux Oües, to fall into a state of ecstasy.

The Tyrant had risen and was striding about in order, he said, to avoid yielding to the temptation of falling upon the half-cooked roast and swallowing it, spit and all, while Blazius had gone to the waggon to get out from a box a huge pewter platter used in stage banquets. The goose was placed thereon with much solemnity, and as soon as the knife was stuck into it, it gave out a sanguineous gravy that smelled most exquisitely.

The fowl was cut up into equal portions, and the meal was resumed anew. This time the food was no longer imaginary and fallacious, and no one felt any

scruple concerning Scappino's action, for hunger had deadened every conscience. The Pedant, who was most particular in matters culinary, asked to be forgiven for not having slices of Seville oranges to serve with the goose, that condiment, as every one knows, being obligatory; but he was readily forgiven.

"And now that we are satisfied," said the Tyrant, as he wiped his beard with his hand, "it would not be out of the way to discuss our future movements. I have not much more than three or four pistoles in my bag, and my office of treasurer is fast becoming a sinecure. We have lost two valuable members of the company, Zerbina and the Swashbuckler; and even had we not done so, we could not well perform in the open country for the benefit of the crows, ravens, and magpies. They would not pay for their seats, having no money of their own, save, it may be, the pies, which are reputed to steal coin, jewellery, spoons, and mugs; yet it would not be wise to reckon upon profits from this source. With the apocalyptic horse that is trying not to die in the shafts of our waggon, we cannot possibly reach Poictiers for a couple of days. Now this is most tragical, for we run the risk of starving to death or being frozen stiff in a ditch before

then, seeing that it is not every day roast geese emerge from the bushes."

"You have admirably stated the trouble we are in," said the Pedant, "but you have not said how we are to get out of it."

"My advice is that we should halt in the first village we come to. Field work has stopped, and the long evenings have set in. We can surely secure the loan of some barn or stable. Scappino shall play the drum in front of the door, and promise a wonderful and unrivalled performance to the open-eyed yokels, who shall furthermore be graciously allowed to pay their entrance-money in kind. A chicken, a piece of ham or meat, or a measure of wine shall entitle the payer to a front seat. A couple of pigeons, a dozen eggs, a bunch of vegetables, a loaf of household bread, or similar victuals shall admit to the back seats. Peasants grudge paying out money, but they do not mind paying with the provisions they have in their hutches, for they cost them nothing, provided as they are by kindly Dame Nature. We shall not fill our purses, it is true, but we shall at least fill our stomachs, an important matter, since it is on Gaster that the whole economy and health of the body depend, as has been wisely

remarked by Menenius. After that we ought not to have any difficulty in reaching Poictiers, where I am acquainted with an innkeeper who will give us credit."

"But what play are we to perform?" inquired Scappino; "that is, supposing we come upon a village. Our repertory is badly disarranged. Tragedies and tragi-comedies would be Greek to rustics who are ignorant of fable and history, and who do not even understand the beautiful French tongue. What we need is a rattling, jolly farce, seasoned not with Attic but with kitchen salt, with lots of stick play, kicks, comical tumbles, and buffoon scurrilities in the Italian fashion. 'The Rodomontades of Captain Hector' would have been the very thing, but unfortunately the Swashbuckler is no more, and it is to the worms alone that he will henceforth spout his tirades."

As Scappino ceased, Sigognac signed with the hand that he desired to speak. A faint blush, the last despatched from the heart to the cheeks by his aristocratic pride, flushed his features, usually colourless even under the biting breeze. The players remained silently awaiting his words.

"Though I lack poor Hector's talent, I am almost as lean as he was. I propose, therefore, to take his

part and to fill it to the best of my ability. I am your comrade; I mean to be so completely. Besides, I am ashamed to have profited by your good luck and to be useless to you now that times are bad. Then who cares for the Sigognacs? My ancestral home is falling in ruins upon the tombs of my forbears; forgetfulness is overwhelming our name, famous of yore, and the ivy is growing over my escutcheon upon my deserted porch. It may be that some day the three storks will joyously spread out their silver wings and that life and happiness will return to the poor dwelling where I have spent my sad and hopeless youth, but meanwhile I ask you, who held out your hands to me to help me out of that hole, to accept me frankly as your comrade. Henceforth I am no longer Sigognac."

Isabella laid her hand on the Baron's arm as if desirous of interrupting him, but Sigognac paid no attention to the young girl's beseeching look, and went on: —

"I fold away my title of Baron and put it at the bottom of my trunk as a garment that is no longer suitable for wear. Do not again call me Baron, and let me see whether, thus disguised, misfortune will continue to know me. Now do I succeed to the Swashbuckler, and my stage name shall be Captain Fracasse!"

"Long live Captain Fracasse!" shouted the company in assent, "and may he be applauded wherever he goes!"

Sigognac's resolve, which surprised the players, was not so sudden as it seemed to be. He had long turned the matter over in his mind; it was painful to him to be a charge to the kindly strollers who shared their own resources so generously with him, never making him feel that he was a burden, and he had come to the conclusion that it was less unworthy of a nobleman to tread the boards and honestly earn his living than to accept it as an idler in the form of sportula or alms. He had indeed thought of returning to Sigognac, but had dismissed the idea as base and cowardly, for it is not in time of rout that a soldier should leave his command. Besides, even could he have made up his mind to go, his love for Isabella would have kept him back, and in addition, though he did not easily indulge his imagination, he fancied in a vague way that all manner of surprising adventures, changes of fortune and strokes of luck might befall him, and these possibilities he would have had to give up if he resumed his old solitary life within his ruinous castle.

The matter having thus been disposed of, the horse

was again harnessed and a fresh start made. The whole company had been revived by the meal, and all, save the duenna and Serafina, who never went on foot when they could drive, walked behind the waggon, to the great relief of the poor animal. Isabella leaned on Sigognac's arm and turned upon him at times a loving glance, for she was sure that it was love for her that had induced him to turn actor, a step so repugnant to the pride of a well-born man. She had meant to scold him for it, but she had not the heart to blame him for a mark of devotion that she would have had him withhold had she foreseen his intention; for she was of those who forget themselves and think only of the interests of the man they love. Presently, feeling somewhat tired, she climbed into the waggon and curled herself up under a blanket by the duenna's side.

On both sides of the road the country, covered with snow, was deserted as far as the eye could reach. There was no sign of town, village, or hamlet.

"There does not seem to be much hope of a full house," said the Pedant after glancing over the distance, "for there does not appear to be much of a public, and the pickled pork, fowls, and strings of onions with which

the Tyrant was making our mouths water a while ago strike me as becoming more and more remote. I cannot see the smoke of a single chimney, and as far as my vision reaches I behold not the meanest of weather-cocks."

"Do not be impatient, Blazius," returned the Tyrant, "and remember that crowded dwellings vitiate the air. It is healthful to place villages well apart."

"At that rate, the people of this district need not fear epidemics, black plague, dysentery, diarrhœa, or malignant and confluent fevers, which, according to physicians, are due to the crowding of the population. But I am very much afraid that if this sort of thing goes on Captain Fracasse will not have a very early opportunity of making his first appearance on any stage."

Meanwhile day was rapidly drawing to a close, and it was scarcely possible to distinguish in the heavy bank of clouds a faint red flush that marked the spot where the sun was setting, tired of illuminating the livid and gloomy landscape dotted with crows.

The snow, hardened by the cold wind, gleamed and glittered. The poor old horse found it increasingly hard to get along; the least slope made it slip, and though it braced itself to the best of its ability on its

broken-kneed legs and held back with its thin quarters, the weight of the waggon overbore it, notwithstanding the fact that Scappino, walking at its head, held it up by the bridle. Cold as it was, the perspiration streamed down its ribs and debilitated limbs, turning to lather where the harness rubbed it. The animal panted like the bellows of a forge, a strange dazed look came into its eyes that seemed to behold phantoms, and it swerved now and then as if stopped by an invisible obstacle. Its shaky frame bumped in drunken fashion now against the one shaft, now against the other; it raised its head and drew its lips up over its gums, and then bent down as if to graze on the snow. Its last hour had struck and it was fighting death standing, like the brave horse it was. At last it went down all of a heap, feebly lashed out for the last time at death, lay down on its side, and never rose again.

Terrified by the sudden jolt that nearly threw them to the ground, the women uttered shrieks of distress; the men hastened to their aid and quickly relieved them from their awkward position. Neither Leonardo nor Serafina were hurt, but the violence of the shock had caused Isabella to faint. Sigognac lifted her up inert and senseless, while Scappino, bending down, felt the

ears of the horse, lying flat on the earth as if it were cut out of cardboard.

"It is dead and gone, and no mistake," said Scappino, rising with a look of discouragement; "its ears are cold, and the pulse in the auricular vein has ceased to beat."

"So, then," exclaimed Leander mournfully, "we shall now have to hang on to a rope like beasts of burden or boatmen hauling a boat, and to drag the waggon along. Cursed be the fancy that led me to turn player!"

"This is no time to weep and moan," roared the Tyrant, exasperated by the young man's unseasonable lamentations. "Let us be men, and decide, like men whom fate cannot dismay, what we had best do. First and foremost, let us ascertain if our good Isabella is much hurt. But no; she is opening her eyes and coming to, thanks to the help of Sigognac and dame Leonardo. Well, then, we must divide into two parties; the one shall stay by the waggon with the women, and the other shall scour the country in search of help, for we are not Russians inured to Scythian cold, and consequently we cannot remain here in winter quarters, squatting in the snow. We should need furs to do that, and dawn would find us frozen stiff and

covered with ice, like candied fruit. Come, Captain Fracasse, Leander, and you Scappino, who are the lightest and as swift-footed as Achilles Peleades, leg it as fast as you can, run like hares, and bring us speedily some assistance. Blazius and I shall mount guard over the vehicle."

The three men were making ready to start, although they had no great hopes of accomplishing anything, for the night was as black as the inside of an oven, and the reflection of the snow alone enabled one to distinguish objects. Darkness, however, if it conceals objects, also brings out light more strongly, and just then a little reddish dot began to glimmer at the foot of a hill some distance from the road.

"Behold the star of safety!" cried the Pedant; "the terrestrial star, as welcome to the sight of the lost wayfarer as the Polar star to sailors in peril of the sea. That star with its blessed rays is a candle or a lamp behind a window-pane, and indicates a well closed room, comfortably warmed, and forming part of a dwelling inhabited by civilised human beings rather than by savage Lestrigonians. There is undoubtedly a bright fire blazing on the hearth, and on the fire a pot wherein is cooking a rich soup; most luscious thought,

that makes my mouth water, as, in fancy, I wash it down with two or three bottles of old crusty wine draped in antique fashion with cobwebs."

"You are raving, old man," said the Tyrant. "The cold is congealing the gray matter of your brain in your old bald head and makes you see visions. There is, however, this much truth in your ravings, that the light does indicate an inhabited house, and our plan of campaign is therefore changed. We shall all proceed together towards that beacon of salvation; it is scarcely likely that thieves are abroad on a night like this for the purpose of carrying off our forest, our public square, and our drawing-room. Let us each take our own things, which make a light bundle, and to-morrow morning we shall come back to fetch the waggon. Indeed, I am getting so miserably cold that my nose is losing all feeling."

The players set off, Isabella leaning on Sigognac's arm, Leander assisting Serafina, Scappino dragging the duenna along, and Blazius and the Tyrant forming the vanguard. They cut across the fields, straight for the light, bothered at times by bushes or ditches, and occasionally sinking in the snow nearly to the knees. At last, after more than one tumble, they reached a

large building surrounded by long walls, with a waggon gate. The place looked like a farm-house, so far as they could make out in the darkness.

The lamp cast a bright square patch of light upon the dark wall and revealed the sash of a small window the shutter of which had not yet been closed. The watch-dogs, having scented the approach of strangers, tumbled out and began to bark. They could be heard running, leaping, and scrambling about in the silence of the night behind the wall; then steps and voices of men mingled with the baying, and presently the whole place was aroused.

"Do you remain at a distance, most of you," said the Pedant. "Our numbers might perhaps frighten these worthy people, who will think we are a band of roughs seeking to invade their rustic homes. As I am old and of kindly aspect, I shall go alone and knock at the door, and negotiate with them. They will not be afraid of me."

This wise advice was followed. Blazius, crooking his fore-finger, knocked at the door, which was first partially opened and then thrown wide open. From the spot where they stood in the snow, the players beheld a rather strange and, to them, inexplicable sight.

The Pedant and the farmer, who had raised his lantern to throw its light upon the face of the man who had thus disturbed him, began, after exchanging a few words which the actors were unable to catch, to gesticulate in most eccentric fashion and to hurl themselves into each other's arms, as is the wont on the stage of two persons who recognise each other.

Encouraged by this reception, the meaning of which they could not fathom, but which they judged, from the pantomime that accompanied it, to be warm and favourable, the players drew near timidly, assuming a woe-begone and modest air, as beseemed travellers in distress seeking hospitality.

"Come on, you people!" shouted the Pedant joyously. "Come on without fear. We have lighted upon a child of the stage, a pet of Thespis, a favourite of Thalia, the comic Muse, upon the famous Bellombre, in a word, formerly the delight of the Court and the city, as well as of the provinces. You are all familiar with his unsurpassed fame. Return thanks to kind fate that has led us straight to the philosopher's retreat, where the glory of the stage is resting upon his laurels."

"Come in, ladies and gentlemen," said Bellombre, advancing towards the players with the graceful cour-

tesy of a man who has not put aside his fine manners though wearing a peasant's dress. "The chill night air might make you hoarse, and modest though my home is, you will nevertheless be more comfortable in it than in the open air."

It will readily be believed that the company required no pressing, and that they entered the house delighted with the adventure, in which, for the matter of that, the only extraordinary thing was the appositeness of the recognition. Blazius had once belonged to the same troupe as Bellombre, and their respective parts precluding any rivalry between them, they had learned to appreciate each other and had become great friends through a community of affection for the bottle. Bellombre, who had taken to the stage after a very turbulent youth, had withdrawn from it, having inherited the farm and surrounding land at his father's death. As his parts called for a youthful appearance, he had not been sorry to leave before wrinkles compelled him to give up. People thought him dead long since, and old amateurs enjoyed worrying young actors by holding him up as an example.

The players entered into a large room that, as is usual in farm-houses, was at one and the same time a

bedroom and a kitchen. A chimney with broad mantel, the shelf of which was hung with a border of faded green serge, took up one of the sides. A brick arch in the brown, varnished wall formed the opening of the oven, just then closed with a sheet-iron door. On huge iron andirons, the hollowed balls of which were fitted to hold plates, blazed with delightful crackling four or five huge logs, or rather tree trunks. The light of this splendid fire illumined the room so brilliantly that the lamp was unnecessary. The reflection of the flame showed in the shadow the outline of a bedstead of Gothic form, ran in brilliant rays along the beams of the ceiling, cast from the legs of the table placed in the centre of the room shadows of the most bizarre form, and flashed in sudden spangles upon the corners of the earthenware and the utensils ranged on the dresser or hung on the walls.

In a corner near the window two or three books thrown upon a carved wooden table proved that the master of the house had not turned wholly into a rustic and that he devoted to reading, a souvenir of his former profession, the leisure time of the long winter evenings.

Revived by the warm atmosphere and the hospitable

welcome, the whole company experienced a sensation of comfort. The rosy flush of life reappeared on the pale faces and on the lips chapped by the cold; gaiety illumined the eyes but now lustreless, and hope sprang anew in every breast. The squinting, lame, and annoying god of ill-luck had at last wearied of persecuting the strollers, and appeased, doubtless, by the death of the Swashbuckler, it condescended to be satisfied with that meagre prey.

Bellombre had summoned his servants, who covered the tablecloth with plates and big-bellied jugs, to the intense delight of Blazius, who had been born thirsty, and was ever ready to imbibe, even in the depth of night.

"Now you see," said he to the Tyrant, "how logical were my deductions from the sight of the little gleam of red light. They were neither a mirage nor a phantasm. Behold the rich vapour that ascends in spirals from the soup abundantly plenished with cabbage, turnips, and other vegetables. The wine, newly drawn, is sparkling red and bright in jugs crowned with rosy foam. The fire is blazing the brighter because of the cold outside, and to top it all, we have for our host the great, the illustrious, and never sufficiently to

be praised Bellombre, the very flower and cream of players past, present, and to come; be this said without offence to the talents of the present company."

"Our happiness would be complete if only poor Captain Hector were with us," said Isabella, with a sigh.

"Why, what harm has come to him?" asked Bellombre, who had heard of the Swashbuckler's fame.

The Tyrant told the tragical tale of the freezing to death of the Captain.

"And but for our having fortunately come across a good old friend," added Blazius, "we should have shared his fate to-night, and have been found frozen stiff like sailors in Cimmerian darkness and cold."

"That would have been a great pity," answered Bellombre, with a meaning look at Isabella and Serafina, "but I am sure these young goddesses would have made the snow melt and nature thaw by the mere fire of their eyes."

"You attribute more power to our glances than they possess," replied Serafina. "They could not have warmed a heart even, in that dreadful, icy-cold obscurity. The tears of frost would have put out the fires of love."

In the course of the meal Blazius informed Bellombre of the condition in which the company found itself, but this did not appear to surprise the ex-actor.

"The fortune of the stage is more capricious than the fortune of the world even," said he. "Its wheel revolves so rapidly that it finds difficulty in balancing itself for more than a moment. But if it falls off frequently, it springs up again skilfully and lightly, and quickly recovers its equilibrium. In the morning I shall send my plough-horses to fetch your waggon here, and we shall build a stage in the barn. There is a large village not far from us which will provide a very good audience. Then, if the performance proves insufficiently remunerative, there are still in my old leather purse a few pistoles of better metal than stage coins, and by Apollo! I shall not leave my old friend Blazius and his comrades in the lurch."

"I see," returned the Pedant, "that you are the same generous Bellombre as ever, and that you have not grown rusty in your rustic and bucolic occupations."

"No, indeed," said Bellombre, "for while I cultivate my land I do not allow my brain to lie fallow. I read over the old authors by the fireplace, my feet on the andirons, and I glance through such of the plays of

the present-day wits as I can obtain in this land of exile. By way of passing the time I study the parts that would be suited to me, and I have come to the conclusion that I was only a very conceited fellow in the days when I was applauded for my sonorous voice, my gallant mien, and my well shaped limbs. At that time I had no real knowledge of the art, and I slammed along like a crow cutting down walnuts. My success was due to lack of intelligence on the part of the public."

"No one but the great Bellombre could venture to say such a thing," put in the Tyrant courteously.

"Art is long and life is short," went on the ex-actor; "and that is especially true of the player who has to render his conception of a part with the help of his personality. I was just acquiring talent, but I was also getting stout, which makes a sentimental and tragedy hero look ridiculous. I made up my mind not to wait for the day when a couple of supernumeraries would have to help me to rise when my part required that I should throw myself on my knees before the princess in order to confess my passion with asthmatic gasps and tearful, rolling eyes. I took advantage of the legacy left me, and withdrew from the stage at the height of

my fame, resolved not to imitate those obstinate actors who are finally driven from the boards by abundant supplies of apple-cores, orange-skins, and hard-boiled eggs."

"You did right, Bellombre," said Blazius, "although you did retire prematurely, for you might well have remained on the stage ten years longer."

Indeed, Bellombre, though tanned by the country air, had retained his handsome mien. His eyes, accustomed to express passion, became animated and flashed as he talked; his nostrils swelled broad and well cut; his lips, as they parted, showed teeth of which a coquette might have been proud; his dimpled chin was firmly rounded, and abundant hair, streaked with a very few silver threads, fell in rich curls upon his shoulders. He was still a remarkably handsome man.

Blazius and the Tyrant went on drinking in company with him; the ladies withdrew to a room in which the servants had lighted a blazing fire. Sigognac, Leander, and Scappino stretched themselves out in a corner of the stable on fresh straw litter, thoroughly protected from the cold by the warm breath of the animals and the wool of the horse-blankets.

While some of my characters are drinking and the

others are sleeping, let us return to the waggon and see what befell there.

The dead horse still lay between the shafts; only, its legs had stiffened like wooden posts, and its head lay flat on the ground upon the hair of its mane, the perspiration on which had frozen into ice crystals in the cold night wind. The glassy eyes were sinking deeper within the sockets, and the thin cheeks seemed to have been dissected.

Day was beginning to break; the winter sun showed half its leaden-white disk between two long banks of clouds, and shed its pale light upon the sad landscape, on which the skeletons of trees stood out black and dismal. Over the white snow hopped ravens, guided by their sense of scent, and prudently drawing nearer the dead animal, mistrusting a trap, a snare, or a danger, for the dark, motionless mass of the waggon frightened them; and they remarked to each other with loud caws that the concern very probably concealed a sportsman in ambush and that a raven looks uncommonly ill in a stew-pan. They hopped on with feverish desire, and then retreated in terror, performing a queer sort of pavan. One, bolder than the rest, broke away from the flock, flapped its heavy wings twice or thrice, rose

from the ground, and settled upon the horse's head. It was already bending forward to pick out the eyes, when it suddenly stopped, bristled up its feathers, and seemed to listen.

Far down the road a heavy step was crunching the snow, and though a human ear might not have noted it, it sounded clear to the raven's keen hearing. The peril was not pressing, and the sombre bird did not leave its position, but it remained watchful. The steps drew near and presently the dim shape of a man carrying a burden loomed up through the morning mists. The raven considered it wise to withdraw, and flew off with a loud caw of warning to its companions in danger.

The whole flock whirred away to the neighbouring trees with harsh, discordant cries. The man had got up to the waggon, and, surprised at coming upon an ownerless vehicle in the middle of the road, with a horse whose main drawback, like Roland's mare, was that it was dead, he stopped short, and cast a suspicious, circumspect glance around him.

Then, in order to examine matters more easily, he laid down his burden, which stood up and began to walk; for it was a little girl some twelve years of age, who, when wrapped up in the long cloak that covered

her from head to foot, and hoisted upon her companion's shoulder, might readily have been mistaken for a valise or a travelling-bag. A pair of black, fiery eyes flashed sombre under the fold of the stuff in which she was clothed, eyes that were identically like Chiquita's; a string of pearls made luminous points in the tawny shadows on her neck, and round her bare legs were twisted rope-shaped rags that contrasted with this piece of luxury.

It was none other than Chiquita herself, and her companion was Agostino, the bandit with the mannikins, who, weary of plying his trade upon untravelled roads, was bound for Paris, where every talent can find occupation, walking by night and hiding by day, as is the habit of all carnivorous and predatory beasts of prey. The child, worn out by fatigue and stiff with cold, had been unable to keep up, in spite of her courage, and Agostino, in search of a shelter, was carrying her as Homer and Belisarius were wont to carry their guides, save that Agostino was not blind, but, on the contrary, possessed eyes as sharp as the lynx, which, as the elder Pliny affirms, is able to see through a stone wall.

"What is the meaning of this?" said Agostino to Chiquita. "As a rule it is we who stop carriages, but

this time it is the carriage that holds us up. We had better look out that it is not full of travellers who will call on us to stand and deliver."

"There is no one in it," said Chiquita, who had peeped in under the canvas top.

"There may be something, then," went on the bandit. "Let us search."

Thereupon, for the daylight did not yet illumine the interior of the waggon, drawing flint, steel, and tinder from the folds of his belt, he struck a light in the dark-lantern he was accustomed to carry on his nocturnal explorations. Chiquita, forgetting her fatigue in the hope of booty, slipped into the vehicle and directed the rays of the lantern upon the parcels it contained, but could make out only a few old stage-drops, properties, and rags of no value.

"Look carefully everywhere, my dear Chiquita," said the highwayman while keeping a bright look-out. "Rummage in the pouches and bags hanging on the sides."

"There is nothing, absolutely nothing worth taking. Stay! here is a bag that chinks as if it contained money."

"Hand it out quick," said Agostino, "and bring the light near while I examine our find. By the horns and

hoofs of Lucifer, we have the devil's own bad luck! I reckoned on good money, and this is nothing more than stage coin of brass and gilded lead. Well, let us make the best of a bad bargain, and rest a while under the awning, which will protect us against the cold wind. Your poor dear little feet are bleeding, and can be of no service to you on this long, rough road. Get under that canvas and sleep for an hour or two. Meanwhile I shall keep watch, and if any one happens along, we can clear out in a twinkling."

Chiquita snuggled away as comfortably as she could within the waggon, pulling the old scenery over herself for the sake of warmth, and soon fell sound asleep. Agostino remained in front, his open navaja by his side and within reach, examining the country with the keen eye of the prowler who allows nothing to escape his glance. The silence was profound and the land deserted. On the distant hills patches of snow gleamed in the pale light of early morn, looking like white phantoms or marble monuments in a graveyard. But everything was reassuringly quiet. Agostino, in spite of his strong will and his iron constitution, felt sleep overcoming him. More than once his eyelids had closed and he had re-opened them with quick reso-

lution. But objects were beginning to look hazy to him and the sense of things to vanish, when, through the incoherent, half-dreamy state into which he had sunk, he seemed to feel a warm, moist breath on his face. He woke up and his eyes opened upon the glare of two burning orbs.

"Wolves do not eat one another, my lad," murmured the highwayman, "and your teeth are not strong enough to tear me."

Then, quicker than thought, he clutched the brute's throat with his left hand, while, picking up his knife with the right, he plunged it up to the hilt in the animal's heart. Nevertheless, though he had come off a victor, Agostino did not think the waggon a place good enough to stay in, and he awoke Chiquita, who exhibited no fear whatever at the sight of the wolf stretched out dead in the road.

"We had better make off," said the bandit. "That dead horse is attracting the wolves, which are mad with hunger in this snowy weather when they can find nothing to eat. Of course I could kill a number of them just as I have killed this one, but they might turn up in scores, and if I happened to fall asleep I should greatly dislike awaking inside the stomach of a car-

nivorous animal. Then, once they had finished me, they would make but one mouthful of you, my little one, for your bones are still soft. Therefore, let us make tracks. That dead brute will delay them. You can manage to walk now, can you?"

"Yes," returned Chiquita, who was no spoiled child brought up in cotton wool, "the short sleep I have had has restored my strength; so, dear Agostino, you will not have to carry me like a troublesome bundle. Besides," she added with fierce energy, "when I can no longer walk, just cut my throat with your big knife and chuck me into a ditch. I shall consider it a favour."

The highwayman and the little girl walked away with rapid steps and were soon lost in the mist. Reassured by their departure, the ravens came down from the trees, swooped down upon the dead horse, and began their horrid feast. Ere long two or three wolves turned up to take their share of the free meal, quite undisturbed by the flapping wings, the croaks, and the beak-thrusts of their black fellow-guests. Birds and quadrupeds alike wrought so heartily that in the course of a few hours the horse, picked clean, showed in the morning light like a skeleton prepared by veteri-

nary surgeons; there was nothing left of it but the tail and the hoofs.

As soon as it was broad daylight, the Tyrant came along with a farm hand to fetch the waggon. He stumbled upon the half-eaten carcass of the wolf, and between the shafts, still clothed with the harness that had been left untouched by beak and tooth alike, beheld the bones of the poor horse. The contents of the bag of stage coin had been scattered upon the road, and in the snow were plainly imprinted tracks both large and small that led to the waggon and then away from it.

"It looks as if the car of Thespis had been visited by various callers during the night," said the Tyrant. "Lucky was the accident that compelled us to interrupt our comic odyssey. I really cannot be sufficiently thankful for it. Thanks to it, we have escaped the two-legged and the four-legged wolves, all of them dangerous, the latter perhaps more so. What a treat for them would have been the tender flesh of the dear little pullets Serafina and Isabella, to say nothing of my own tough meat."

While the Tyrant was thus soliloquising to himself, Bellombre's servant had cast the waggon loose and was harnessing to it the horse he had brought along, though

the animal snorted with terror at the terrifying sight of the skeleton and at the evil scent of the wolf whose blood stained the snow.

The waggon was put under a shed in the farm-yard; nothing had been removed from it, and indeed something had been left in it, — a small knife, one of those manufactured at Albacete, which had fallen from Chiquita's pocket while she was asleep, and which bore upon its sharp-pointed blade the threatening Spanish motto, —

"Cuando esta vivora pica,
No hay remedio en la botica."

This mysterious find greatly puzzled the Tyrant and rendered Isabella thoughtful, for she was somewhat superstitious and apt to draw omens, favourable or the reverse, from trifling incidents that others either did not notice or laid no stress upon. Like all fairly educated persons at that time, the young lady spoke Spanish, and the alarming meaning of the inscription did not escape her.

Scappino had started for the village, dressed in his handsome red and white striped costume, his great ruff, duly pleated and starched, his toque pulled down over his brows, his cloak on his shoulder, and with the air of a proud conqueror. As he walked, his drum bumped

against his thigh with an automatic, rhythmic motion that smacked of the trooper; and indeed Scappino had followed the wars before he had taken to the stage. When he reached the church square, already escorted by a number of boys attracted by his curious dress, he pressed down his toque more firmly, took his stand, and striking his drum with the sticks, performed a roll so sharp, so masterly, and so imperative that it would have wakened the dead as surely as the last trump. The effect on the living may therefore easily be guessed; every door and window flew open as if moved by one and the selfsame spring, and from one and all issued kerchiefed heads that cast comically bewildered glances on the square. A second roll of the drum, crackling like a rattling fire of musketry and booming like the thunder, emptied the houses, wherein were left only the sick, the bedridden, and the women abed with child. In a few minutes the inhabitants of the village had formed a great circle around Scappino. Then, in order to completely fascinate his audience, the sly fellow performed upon his drum a number of long and short rolls alternately, so rapidly, so accurately, and so skilfully that the sticks became invisible, although he did not appear to be moving his wrists. As soon as

he saw the wide-open mouths of the worthy villagers assume the form of an O, which, according to master-painters, as set forth in their works on expression, is the highest manifestation of wonderment, he broke his racket short off; then, after a brief moment of silence, he began in a shrill voice, with fantastic variations of intonation, the following grandiloquent and burlesque address: —

"Unique opportunity this evening! Magnificent performance! Extraordinary representation! The illustrious comedians of the travelling company managed by my lord Herod, who have had the honour of performing before crowned heads and princes of the blood, will, on the occasion of their passage through this region, present, this evening only, — for they are awaited in Paris, to which they are called by the Court, — a surprisingly entertaining and altogether comical play, entitled 'The Rodomontades of Captain Fracasse,' with new dresses, entirely new by-play, and set bastinadoes unequalled as mirth provokers. At the close of the performance Mademoiselle Serafina will dance the Moresco, with the addition of passepieds, swings, and gambadoes in the very latest style, while accompanying herself on the tambourine, on which she performs more skil-

fully than any Spanish gipsy. This will prove most delightful as a spectacle. The performance will take place in Master Bellombre's barn, specially arranged for the purpose and abundantly furnished with seats and lights. As the company seeks fame rather than profit, victuals and other provisions will be accepted in lieu of cash from those who are not provided with coin. Pass the word to that effect."

His speech finished, Scappino beat his drum so madly by way of peroration that the glass in the church windows rattled in its lead setting, and a number of dogs bolted away, more terrified than if they had had brass saucepans fastened to their tails.

Meanwhile, up at the farm, the players, assisted by Bellombre and his servants, were already at work. At the end of the barn a stage, consisting of boards laid upon empty barrels, was erected. Three or four benches borrowed from the tavern served as settles, but, considering the price of admission, it was not to be expected that they should be stuffed with hair and upholstered in velvet. The spiders had already undertaken to decorate the ceiling and had spun great cobwebs from rafter to rafter. No decorator, even one in employ of the Court could have produced more tenuous,

more delicate, and more aerially elaborate hangings, even had he used China satins. The pendent webs resembled the blazoned banners that may be seen in the chapter-houses of royal and knightly orders, and formed a most noble sight for any man capable of appreciating, in imagination, this analogy.

The cattle, whose litter had been carefully swept back, were much disturbed by the unusual upheaval, and often turned their heads away from their mangers to cast long looks at the stage, on which the players were rehearsing in order to practise Sigognac in his entrances and exits.

"My first appearance on the stage," said the Baron, laughing, "is before an audience of calves and horned cattle. It might well wound my self-love, if I had any."

"Nor will this be the last time you will play before such an assembly," returned Bellombre; "for in every audience you will have fools and husbands."

For a novice Sigognac did not play at all badly, and it was evident that he would speedily get the hang of his work. He had a good voice, an accurate memory, and a mind sufficiently cultured to enable him to add to his part those repartees that spring from fortuitous circumstances and which add so much to the vivacity of a

performance. The pantomimic portion of his part troubled him far more, on account of its being plentifully sprinkled with whackings, against which his pride revolted, even though the blows were administered with sticks formed of painted canvas stuffed with sawdust. His comrades, aware of his rank, spared him as much as they could, but he became wrathy in spite of himself, and made the most terrific grimaces, frowned most formidably, and cast furious glances around. Then, quickly remembering the nature of his part, he resumed his frightened, bewildered, and suddenly cowardly mien.

Bellombre, who was watching him with the clear-sightedness of an old actor, an expert past master of his art, called to him from where he was sitting: —

"Take care not to repress any of those natural movements of yours; they are excellent and will produce a new variety of the Hector type. Even when you cease to feel that sudden anger and that burning indignation, you must feign to do so. Fracasse, the character you have to create, — for an imitator never rises above a subordinate rank, — would give anything to be a brave man; he admires courage and valiant men, and is mad with himself for being a coward.

When no danger is near, he dreams only of heroic exploits and superhuman and gigantic enterprises; but in the presence of peril, his too lively imagination brings vividly before him the smart of wounds, the hideous face of death, and his heart fails him. He revolts at first at the thought of being thrashed, rage swells his proud stomach; but the very first blow dispels all his resolution. That is a better plan than making your legs tremble, opening your eyes wide, and indulging in other grimaces fitter for monkeys than men, with which inferior actors strive to make the public laugh while themselves straying far from the paths of art."

Sigognac took Bellombre's advice and played in conformity with his instructions; so well indeed that he was applauded by his comrades, who predicted that he would win success.

The performance was to take place at four in the afternoon. At three, Sigognac put on the Hector costume, which dame Leonardo had made easier by letting out the tucks which the increasing leanness of the deceased owner had rendered necessary. As he slipped it on, the Baron thought it would have been pleasanter to be putting on the buff jerkin and the steel corselet of his ancestors than to be rigging himself out as a player

in order to perform the part of sham hero; the more so that he was really a brave man, capable of high deeds and heroic exploits. But adverse fortune had reduced him to this unpleasant condition and he had no other means of livelihood.

The country people were already pouring into and crowding the barn. A few lanterns hanging from the roof rafters cast a reddish light upon the mass of dark, fair, and gray hair, amid which showed the white caps of a few women. Other lanterns had been placed as footlights along the front of the stage, for it was necessary to be careful not to set fire to the hay and straw in the place.

The play began and was followed attentively. Behind the actors, for the back of the stage was not lighted up, the great shadows cast by them seemed to be playing a parody of the piece, and to counterfeit the movements of each and all with queer jerking motions. This grotesque detail, however, remained unnoticed by the simple-minded spectators, who were absorbed by the plot and the performance of the actors, every one of whom they believed to be really the character he or she represented.

A few of the cows, unable to sleep on account of the

noise, gazed upon the scene with those great eyes of theirs from which Homer, the Greek poet, drew a comparison in praise of Juno's own, and even a calf, at a most interesting point, uttered a lamentable moan that in no wise impaired the robust illusion of the worthy spectators, but nearly caused the players to burst out laughing on the stage.

Captain Fracasse was repeatedly applauded, for he played his part capitally, free as he was, in presence of that humble public, from the emotion he would have felt had he had to do with more cultured spectators who would have been harder to please. Then he felt quite sure that not one of these people knew who he was. The other performers were vigorously applauded when they made their hits, by the horny-handed sons of toil, who spared not themselves, and who, in Bellombre's opinion, gave proof of much discernment.

Serafina danced her Moresco with haughty voluptuousness, bending and posing in most alluring fashion, with springs light and graceful, rapid changes of foot, and charms of all kinds that would have delighted even people of quality and courtiers. She was particularly fascinating when, holding her tambourine above her head, she rattled the brass disks, and again when,

thumbing its dark skin, she drew from it a low rumbling sound as cleverly as any professional *panderera*.

Meanwhile on the walls of the ruinous manor-house of Sigognac, the dusty ancestral portraits assumed a grimmer and sulkier expression than ever before. The warriors shook their heads in most melancholy fashion, and uttered sighs that made their steel cuirasses heave. The dowagers pouted disdainfully above their pleated ruffs, and drew themselves up stiffly in their whale-boned bodices and farthingales. A low, slow, toneless whisper, the ghost of a whisper, issued from their painted lips, murmuring, "Alas! the last of the Sigognacs has derogated!"

And in the kitchen, seated sadly between Beelzebub and Miraut, who looked long and questioningly into his face, Peter was thinking, and saying to himself, "Where is my poor master at this hour?" And a tear, licked away by the old hound's tongue, rolled down the tanned cheek of the old servitor.

He was right: the bravo suddenly sank to the ground as if he had fallen on his face, and the baron saw no opponent in front of him, but a lightning stroke, cutting in with a hiss, flashed so swift towards him that he had just time to parry with a circular half-parade that broke Lampourde's sword clean in two pieces. — Page 309.

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Captain Fracasse

VIII

COMPLICATIONS ARISE

THE day after the performance Bellombre drew Blazius to one side, and, undoing the strings of a long leather purse, poured out, as from a cornucopia, one hundred shining pistoles which he set up in piles, to the great admiration of the Pedant, who gazed upon the outspread treasure, his eyes shining with covetousness of the gold.

With a splendid gesture Bellombre gathered up the pistoles at one swoop and planted them in his friend's hand.

"You readily understood," he said, "that I did not make such a display of coin merely for the purpose of tantalising you and exasperating your desires. Pocket the cash without any scruples; I make you a present

of it; or, if your pride rebels at the idea of accepting a gift from your old comrade, call it a loan. Money is the sinews of war, love, and the drama. Besides, these coins, having been made round so that they might roll, are getting tired of remaining flat in the recesses of this purse, where, in time, they would grow rusty and become covered with cobwebs and fungi. Here I spend nothing, for I live in rustic fashion, fed by Mother Earth, the great nurse of mankind. Therefore I shall not feel the need of the money."

Having no reply ready in answer to this rhetoric, Blazius pocketed the pistoles and cordially embraced Bellombre. His vinous eye shone brighter than usual between his winking lids; the light flashed on a tear, and the efforts the old actor was making to keep back this pearl of gratitude caused his bushy eyebrows to move in the most comical way. Sometimes they went up to the middle of his forehead amid waves of close-set wrinkles, and sometimes they drooped so low as almost to obscure his glance. These manœuvres of his, however, did not prevent the tear from slipping out and rolling down his nose warmed up to a cherry colour by the libations of the previous night, and evaporating upon the nostril.

It was plain that the ill-luck that had hitherto attended the company had ceased to pursue them. The profits of the performance, added to Bellombre's pistoles, formed a very handsome sum, a certain amount of coin being found mixed up with the provisions, and the car of Thespis, recently so bare of food, was now well stocked. In order not to do things by halves, Bellombre lent the players a pair of strong plough-horses, neatly harnessed, with painted collars adorned with bells that tintinnabulated most pleasantly as the stout animals plodded along.

So the comedians, refreshed and happy, made their entry into Poictiers, not, to be sure, as pompously as did Alexander into Babylon, but quite majestically for all that. The lad who was to take the horses back walked at their head and moderated their pace, for they smelt from afar the warm odour of the stables. As they drove through the tortuous streets of the town, the wheels rumbled over the rough pavement and the iron-work clanked merrily, drawing the people to their windows and to the door of the inn, where, by way of calling for the gate, the driver cracked his whip, breaking out into such a joyous volley that his horses started suddenly and set all their bells tinkling and chiming.

This was very different from the humble, piteous, and furtive fashion in which the actors had, not so long since, approached the most wretched of pot-houses; and the landlord of "The French Arms" easily understood from the noise that the new-comers had money in their pockets, and consequently hastened in person to open wide the two leaves of the carriage-gate.

"The French Arms" hostel was the finest inn in Poictiers, that patronised by rich and well-born travellers. The court into which the chariot entered looked quite fine; it was surrounded by clean-looking buildings, with a covered balcony or external passage supported upon iron brackets running right round; a convenient arrangement which facilitated the waiting upon guests and gave ready access to the rooms, every one of which looked out on the court. At the back of the court there opened out an archway through which the offices, kitchens, stables, and sheds were reached.

Over all reigned an air of prosperity. The walls, recently repointed, were bright to the eye, and there was not a speck of dust upon the woodwork of the stairs and the balustrades of the balconies. The new bright red tiles, the flutings of which still held a few

traces of snow, shone cheerfully in the winter sunshine, and from the chimney-tops rose spirals of smoke that promised good cheer. At the foot of the steps, cap in hand, stood the innkeeper, a most corpulent fellow, whose triple chin spoke eloquently of the excellence of his cooking, while the superiority of his cellar was attested by the superb purple colour of his face, which seemed to have been rubbed with blackberries, like the features of Silenus, Bacchus' kindly drunken preceptor. A smile spreading from ear to ear caused his fat cheeks to puff out and nearly concealed his cunning eyes, marked at the outer corners with crows' feet of facetious wrinkles. He was, indeed, so blooming, so plump, so rosy, so appetising, so well-kept that he inspired the desire to spit him and eat him with his own gravy for a sauce.

On seeing the Tyrant, whom he knew of old and who, he was aware, was good pay, his delight was markedly increased, for actors attract customers and the young fellows in society spend money on collations, suppers, and other entertainments in order to win the good graces of the ladies by treating them to delicacies, choice wines, sweets, preserves, and similar good things.

"Good luck to you, Master Herod," said he. "It is long since you have put up at 'The French Arms.'"

"That is true," returned the Tyrant, "but it does not do to go on performing our nonsense in the same place too long. The spectators learn all our tricks and could perform them themselves. A little absence is a good thing; what has been forgotten is as good as new. Are there many members of the nobility in Poictiers just now?"

"Numbers of them, Master Herod; the hunting season is over and they are at a loss for entertainments, for even eating and drinking are apt to pall. You will have crowded houses."

"In that case," said the Tyrant, "bring the keys of seven or eight rooms, take three or four capons from the spit, bring out a dozen bottles of that good old wine you wot of, and spread through the town the report that the illustrious company of his lordship Herod has put up at 'The French Arms,' that it has a stock of new plays and intends to give several performances."

While the Tyrant and the innkeeper were thus talking, the players had got out of the chariot; the servants took their luggage and carried it to the rooms that had

been assigned each of them. Isabella's happened to be somewhat apart from the others, the nearer ones being engaged. This in no wise displeased the young lady, whose modesty was not infrequently jarred by the Bohemian-like promiscuity entailed by the wandering life of strolling players.

Thanks to the chatter of host Bilot, the whole town speedily was made aware that a company of actors had arrived, and would present the plays of the finest wits of the day as well as, if not better than, the Paris troupe. The bucks and blades inquired whether the actresses were handsome, and curled up their mustaches with an air of easy conquest and self-satisfaction most ridiculous to behold. Bilot replied, with an accompaniment of significant grimaces, in a discreet and mysterious fashion that was well calculated to turn the heads and to pique the curiosity of these young calves.

Isabella had her clothes placed upon the trays in the wardrobe which, with a valanced bed, a table with twisted legs, two arm-chairs and a wooden coffer, composed the furniture of her room ; then she proceeded to pay that attention to her toilet which is indispensable in the case of a refined young lady, careful of her appearance, after a long trip in the company of men. She

undid her long hair, finer than silk, brushed it, combed it, poured upon it a few drops of essence scented with bergamot, and fastened it up again with bows of narrow blue ribbon, a colour that well became her blush-rose complexion. Next she changed her linen, and any one who might have caught sight of her then would have believed he beheld one of Diana's nymphs preparing, after having thrown off her garments, to step into a pool in some wooded vale of Hellas. But it was merely a flash, for over her fair nudity suddenly fell a jealous mist of linen; Isabella was chaste and modest even when alone. Next she put on a gray gown trimmed with blue, and looking at herself in the mirror she smiled, with that smile which the least coquettish of women bestows upon herself when she is satisfied with her appearance.

The snow had melted under the influence of the higher temperature, and, save on places looking to the north, there was no trace of it left. The sun was shining, and Isabella could not resist the temptation to open the window and put her pretty face out to enjoy the view from her room; an innocent fancy enough, since the window opened upon a lonely lane, closed in on one side by the inn itself and on the

other by a long garden wall over which rose the tops of leafless trees. She could look into the garden and note the pattern of a bed outlined with scroll-work formed of box plants. At the end of the garden rose a mansion whose blackened walls betokened its age.

Two gentlemen were walking in the garden by the side of a high hedge. They were both young and handsome, but of unequal rank, as was proved by the deference the one paid to the other, keeping a little behind him and giving him the crown of the walk every time they had to retrace their steps. Of this friendly couple the former was Orestes and the latter Pylades. Orestes, as I shall call him until I have learned his real name, was about twenty or twenty-two; his complexion was pale, and his hair very black. A doublet of tan-coloured velvet set off his handsome figure; a short cloak, of the same stuff and the same colour as the doublet, and trimmed with three rows of gold lace, hung from his shoulder and was fastened by a cord the knots of which fell down upon his breast. He wore boots of soft white Russia leather, and his feet were so small that many a woman would have envied their size and their high-arched instep, set off to greater advantage by the high boot-heels. The easy boldness of his motions

and the proud security of his mien proved him to be a lord of high degree who was sure of being welcome everywhere, and before whom life opened free from difficulties. Pylades, red-haired and red-bearded, and dressed in black from head to foot, was far from displaying, good-looking though he was, the same triumphant assurance.

"I tell you, my dear fellow, that I am sick of Corisande," said Orestes as they turned back at the top of the walk and continued a conversation begun before Isabella opened her window. "I have ordered my porter not to admit her, and I am going to send her back her portrait, which is as unpleasant to me as her own self, together with her letters that weary me equally as much as her conversation."

"Yet Corisande loves you," remarked Pylades timidly.

"What do I care for that so long as I do not love her?" replied Orestes hotly. "It has nothing to do with the matter. Am I to be charitable enough to love all the wenches and silly females that fall in love with me? I am too kind-hearted as it is. I allow myself to be fooled by their tearful looks, their sobs, sighs, and lamentations, and I let myself be caught at last while inwardly cursing my lack of spirit and my tenderness

of feeling. Henceforth I shall be the coldest of the cold, icy as Hippolytus and an avoider of women like Joseph. It will take a clever Potiphar to get her hands on the edge of my cloak. I declare myself henceforth a misogynist, a foe to petticoats, whether they be of camlet or taffeta. I will have no more to do with duchesses, courtesans, citizens' wives, or shepherd girls, for who deals with women lays up for himself troubles, disappointments, and unpleasant adventures. I hate them from the crown of their heads to the soles of their feet, and I shall intrench myself in chastity as a monk in his cowl. That accursed Corisande has for ever disgusted me with her sex. I will have nothing more to do with it in the future."

Orestes had got thus far in his discourse when, looking up as if to call Heaven to witness his vow, he chanced to catch sight of Isabella at her window. Nudging his companion, he said to him: —

"Note at yonder window, blooming like Aurora on her balcony in the East, that adorable and lovely creature, more like a goddess than a mortal, with her light-brown hair, her pure face, and her gentle eyes. How well she looks, thus leaning on her arms and bending somewhat forward, showing to advantage, under the

gauze of her chemisette, her rounded ivory breasts. I dare swear that she is most sweet-tempered and in no wise resembles other women. She is assuredly modest, amiable, and cultured, and charming and agreeable in her intercourse."

"By Jupiter!" said Pylades, laughing, "you must have uncommonly good sight to see all that from here. For my own part all I can make out is a woman at a window. She is not bad, no doubt, but I fancy she is not endowed with the incomparable perfections you have bestowed upon her so liberally."

"Oh! I am over head and ears in love with her already. I am madly in love with her, and have her I must, even if I have to make use of my most subtle inventions, to empty my coffers, and run a hundred rivals through the body."

"Come, come; do not get so hot over it; you might catch a pleurisy," said Pylades. "But what has become of that fine hatred of the sex you were boasting of but now? The first glimpse of a pretty face has been sufficient to dispel it."

"When I stormed and raved as I did, I was not aware of the existence of that angel of beauty, and all I uttered was but damnable blasphemy, rank heresy,

and downright wickedness, which I pray Venus, goddess of love, to forgive me."

"She will forgive you, no doubt, for she is very indulgent towards mad-brained lovers, among whom you deserve to be the standard-bearer."

"I shall proceed to open the campaign," said Orestes, "and courteously declare war upon my beautiful foe."

So saying, he stopped, stared straight at Isabella, took off his hat in gallant and respectful fashion, swept the ground with the plume, and blew a kiss in the direction of the window.

The young actress, who perceived his action, assumed a calm and collected expression, to make the insolent fellow understand that he had made a mistake, closed the window, and drew down the blind.

"Aurora is hidden behind a cloud," said Pylades. "That does not augur well for the rest of the day."

"On the contrary, I consider my beauty's retreat a favourable sign. When a soldier withdraws behind the crenellations of the tower, it means that the assailant's arrow has gone home. She is winged, I tell you, and the kiss I blew to her will compel her to think of me all night, if for no other purpose than to call me

names and charge me with being a bold, bad man, a fault which ladies are inclined to look leniently upon. There is now something between the fair unknown and me; a very slender thread, I grant, but that I shall strengthen until I have made it into a rope whereby I shall climb up to my lady's bower."

"You are uncommonly well up in all the stratagems and theories of love," put in Pylades respectfully.

"I occasionally pique myself on it," returned Orestes. "And now let us go in; my timid fair will not put in an appearance again for some time. This evening I shall set my scouts at work."

The two friends slowly ascended the steps to the old mansion and disappeared. Now let me return to my players.

Not far from the inn stood a tennis-court, admirably adapted to the purposes of a play-house. The actors hired it, and a master carpenter in the town speedily fitted it for its new destination under the direction of the Tyrant. A glazier and house-painter, who undertook to daub signs and to paint coats of arms upon carriage panels, touched up the worn and discoloured scenery and even painted a new set not unskilfully. The dressing-room used by the tennis-players was

turned into a green-room for the company, screens being placed round the actresses' toilet-tables and forming small dressing-rooms. Every reserved seat had been taken beforehand, and there was every prospect of a paying house.

"What a pity," said the Tyrant to Blazius, as they ran over the plays that they proposed to give, "what a pity that Zerbina has left us. A soubrette is in truth the salt, *mica salis*, and the spice of a comedy. Her sparkling gayety illumines the play; she enlivens the parts that would otherwise prove slow; and she compels laughter even from the unwilling by the mere exhibition of her pretty gleaming teeth between her ruby lips. Her chatter, her sauciness, her lasciviousness form a pleasant contrast with the modest affectation, the soft speech, and the cooing of the leading lady. The bright colours of her audacious dress tickle the eye, and she can show her shapely leg and her red stockings clocked with gold, up to the knee or almost up to it, for that is a sight both young and old men delight in; especially the old, whose dormant salaciousness it awakens."

"Undoubtedly," replied Blazius, "a soubrette is a precious condiment, a spice-box that gives a relish to

the sickly comedies of the day. But we must perforce do without one, for neither Isabella nor Serafina can play the part, and besides we need them for the parts of leading lady and maiden in love. The devil fly away with that Marquis of Bruyères who has robbed us of the pearl, the phœnix and paragon of maids in the person of the incomparable Zerbina!"

The two actors had got so far in their conversation when the silvery tinkling of bells was heard at the entrance to the inn. Soon the quick cadence of hoofs sounded upon the pavement of the yard, and the two men, leaning over the balustrade of the gallery in which they were strolling up and down, saw three mules, harnessed in the Spanish fashion, with plumes on their heads, embroideries, tufts of wool, clusters of bells, and striped blankets, all very clean and handsome, and evidently not worn by hired animals.

The first was ridden by a hulking lackey, in gray livery, with a hunting-knife in his belt and an arquebuse across his saddle-bow, who looked insolent enough to be a lord, and who, had he been better dressed, might have passed for the master of the company. He led behind him, by a long strap twisted round his arm, the second mule, which carried two huge bundles balanced

on either side the pack-saddle and covered with a Valencian muestra cape.

The third mule, handsomer and more spirited than the other two, carried a young woman warmly wrapped up in a fur-lined cloak and wearing a gray felt hat with red plume, pulled well down over her face.

"Look here," said Blazius to the Tyrant, "does not that procession remind you of something? It seems to me that this is not the first time I have heard the tinkling of these bells."

"By Saint Alipantinus!" returned the Tyrant, "these are the very mules that carried off Zerbina at the carfax of the Cross. Speak of angels —"

"And you see their tails," interrupted Blazius. "O thrice and four times blessed day, to be marked with a white stone! It is Señora Zerbina herself. See her jump down from her steed, with that wanton movement of the hips that marks her out among all other women, and hand her cloak to the lackey. Now she is removing her hat and shaking out her hair as a bird fluffs its feathers. Let us go to meet her, and scoot down the steps four at a time."

Blazius and the Tyrant hastened down to the yard and met Zerbina at the foot of the steps. The

lively girl threw her arms round the Pedant's neck and catching hold of his head in her hands, —

"I must embrace you," she said, joining the action to the words, "and kiss your ugly old face as heartily as if you were a handsome young fellow, so glad am I to see you again. Don't be jealous, Herod, and don't frown as if you were about to order the massacre of the Innocents. I shall kiss you too; I began with Blazius because he is uglier than you."

Zerbina faithfully fulfilled her promise, for she was a woman of her word and honest in her own way. Giving a hand to each of the actors, she ascended to the gallery, where Master Bilot had a room made ready for her. She had scarcely entered when she threw herself into an arm-chair and breathed loud, like a person relieved of a burden.

"You cannot imagine how glad I am to be with you again," said she to the two men after a moment of silence. "But do not fancy that it is because I am in love with your old snouts damaged by powder and rouge. Thank Heaven! I am in love with no one. I am glad because I am back in my own element, and one is always uncomfortable out of it. Water is not the thing for birds any more than air is for fishes;

birds drown in the one and fishes suffocate in the other. I am a born actress and the stage is the only place I can breathe in. On the stage only do I really live; the smell of the candles is sweeter to me than the scent of civet, benzoin, ambergris, musk, and perfumed skins. The odour of the wings is more delightful than balm to me. Sunshine bores me and the realities of life weary me. I need imaginary loves to serve, and the world of romantic adventures in plays to satisfy my active disposition. Since poets have ceased to lend me their voices, I seem to have become dumb; so I have returned to take my parts up again. I hope you have not engaged any one in my place; not that any one could possibly take that place of mine, but if you have, I shall scratch the wretch's face and break her front teeth right in front of the footlights. I can be the very devil when any one trenches upon my privileges."

"There will be no need of your indulging in such carnage," said the Tyrant. "We have no soubrette. Dame Leonardo took your parts, playing them old and adapted to her rank of duenna; a pretty solemn and unpleasant change, to which we were driven by necessity. If you had possessed one of the magical unguents of which Apuleius speaks, and had transformed

yourself into a bird and perched upon the edge of the roof a moment ago, you would have heard our conversation and enjoyed a sensation most novel to the absent — your praises sung on a lyric, Pindaric, and dithyrambic mode."

"That 's right," answered Zerbina. "I see that you are still my good old comrades and that sprightly Zerbina was missed."

The servants entered and brought in packages, boxes, and valises, which the actress checked, and opened by means of a number of small keys, hung on a silver ring, in presence of the two men.

They contained handsome clothes, fine linen, guipures, lace, pieces of velvet and of China satins. There was also a long, wide, heavy leather bag, stuffed full of money, the strings of which Zerbina undid, pouring the gold out on the table, so that the flow was like that of Pactolus coined and minted. She plunged her little brown hands into the golden heap, as a winnower in a heap of corn, picked up as much as she could hold in her two hands, then opened them and allowed the money to fall in a shower more brilliant and heavier than that which proved the undoing of Danaë, the daughter of Acrisius, in her brazen tower.

Zerbina's eyes sparkled as brightly as did the gold pieces, her nostrils were dilated, and nervous laughter caused her white teeth to show.

"Serafina would burst with spite did she see me handling so much money," said she to Herod and Blazius. "I show it to you in order that you may know it is not want that has brought me back to the fold, but sheer love of my art. Now, my old friends, if you are strapped for ready rhino, help yourselves freely and even a little more than freely."

The players thanked her for her generosity, and told her they were in no present need.

"Never mind, then," returned Zerbina. "Some other time you may want cash, and I shall keep it for you in my box like a faithful treasurer."

"So it is you who have forsaken the poor Marquis," said Blazius, with an air of contrition; "for you are not the sort of woman that is forsaken. It is the part of Circe, and not that of Ariadne, you play. Yet he was a splendid nobleman, of handsome figure, with the Court air about him, clever, and in every respect worthy of being loved rather longer."

"My intention is to keep him as I would keep a ring on my finger and the most precious gem in my

jewel-box," answered Zerbina. "I have by no means forsaken him, and I have only run away to make him come after me."

"*Fugax sequax*, *sequax fugax*," returned the Pedant. "These four Latin words, with their cabalistic consonance that recalls the croaking of the frogs in the comedy of that name by Master Aristophanes, the Athenian poet, contain in themselves the very marrow of the theory of love, and might serve as a rule of life for the male as well as for the female sex."

"What does that Latin of yours mean, you old Pedant?" asked Zerbina. "You have omitted to translate it into French, forgetting that we have not all been, like you, schoolmasters and dispensers of thrashings."

"It may be translated," returned Blazius, "into a couple of lines or versicles somewhat as follows: —

"'If you would be followed, away with you;
If you should follow, it is away with you.'"

"That," said Zerbina, breaking out into laughter, "is downright caramel and cracker poetry. I am sure it can be sung as a round."

Whereupon the madcap girl began singing the Pedant's verses at the top of her voice, in so clear, so

silvery and so pearly a voice that it was delightful to listen to her. She accompanied her song with such expressive faces, sometimes smiling, sometimes frowning, that one could have sworn two lovers were, the one running away, the other pursuing, the one hot, the other cold.

When she had satisfied her roguish humour, she quieted down and became serious once more.

"Listen to my tale," said she. "The Marquis had sent his lackey and his muleteer to meet me at the carfax of the Cross and take me thence to a lodge or hunting-box in one of his forests. It is very solitary and exceedingly difficult to come upon, if one does not know of its existence, for it is concealed by a dark fir wood. It is there that his lordship indulges in debauches with a number of boon companions. They can shout 'Drink deep!' and 'No heel-taps!' without being heard by any one save an aged servitor whose business it is to replenish the flagons. It is also the retreat devoted to his loves and gallantries. It contains a very nice apartment hung with Flanders pastoral tapestries, and furnished with an old-fashioned, but wide, soft, comfortable bed, with plenty of pillows and curtains; a dressing-table provided with everything

a woman can possibly require, even were she a duchess: combs, sponges, bottles of scents, opiates, boxes of patches, pomade for the lips, almond paste; also arm-chairs, chairs, and stools admirably upholstered, and a Turkish carpet so thick that you can tumble about anywhere upon it without hurting yourself. This mysterious retreat is on the second story. I call it mysterious because from outside no one could guess at its splendour. The walls have been darkened by time, and they look as though they would fall but for a great ivy that clings to and supports them. If you were to pass the place, you would believe it to be uninhabited. At night, the shutters and window curtains prevent the light of the fire and the tapers from being seen outside."

"That would make a fine setting for the fifth act of a tragi-comedy," said the Tyrant. "It would be just the place for a duel to the death."

"You are so much in the habit of playing tragic parts," answered Zerbina, "that you are always thinking of horrors. The place is, on the contrary a very bright one, for the Marquis is anything but bloodthirsty."

"Go on with your story, Zerbina," said Blazius, with a gesture of impatience.

"On approaching that wild place," continued the girl, "I could not repress a slight sensation of fear, not for my virtue, but it did occur to me that the Marquis intended to shut me up in a sort of oubliette, from which I should emerge only at such times as it suited his fancy. I have not the smallest taste for dungeons with grated windows, and I would not put up with captivity, even to become the favourite sultana of His Highness the Grand Seignior. I reflected, however, that my profession is that of soubrette, and that in the course of my life I had helped so many Isabellas, Leonoras and Doralises to escape, that I would be sure of devising some means of escaping myself, in the event, of course, of the Marquis desiring to detain me against my will. A pretty thing indeed it would have been if a jealous man could make a prisoner of Zerbina! So I entered the place bravely, and I was most pleasantly surprised on finding that this lodging, which frowns upon passers-by, smiled upon the guests within. It was ruinous outside, but luxurious inside. A bright fire blazed on the hearth; rose-coloured wax tapers were reflected in the mirror-backs of the sconces, while on the table, graced with a wealth of glass, silver-plate, and flagons, was laid a supper as abundant as it

was delicate. Pieces of rich stuffs, carelessly thrown upon the side of the bed, reflected the light from their folds, and on the dressing-table gems, bracelets, necklaces and ear-rings flashed and sparkled in their golden settings. I felt quite reassured. A young peasant girl drew the portière aside and offered to assist me. She removed my travelling-dress and helped me to put on one more suitable, that hung ready for me in the wardrobe. The Marquis was not long in making his appearance. He declared I looked fascinating in my taffeta wrapper trimmed with white and cerise, and swore that he really and truly loved me to madness. We sat down to supper, and although I do violence to my modesty in saying so, I must perforce own that I talked brilliantly. I seemed to have the devil's own wit; I flashed out clever things, and hit upon the brightest repartees, laughing the while in most bewitching fashion. I cannot give you any idea of the go, the dash, and the joyous swing of it all. It was enough to make the dead get up and dance and the ashes of old King Priam flame up again. The Marquis, dazzled, fascinated, intoxicated, called me alternately angel and demon; he proposed killing his wife and marrying me. The dear man would have done it too, but I would not

hear of it, objecting that that kind of thing was decidedly stale, middle-class, and commonplace. I do not believe that Lais, the beautiful Imperia, or Mistress Vanozza, who was a Pope's paramour, ever made a supper go off so stunningly.

"I kept it up in this way for several days, but little by little the Marquis became thoughtful, seeming to miss something he could not define, but that he felt the want of. He rode out several times, and even invited two or three friends by way of diversion. Knowing his vanity, I dressed in a way to set off my looks to the best advantage, and I multiplied my graces, my airs, and my coquetries for the benefit of these country bumpkins, who had never seen anything to match me. At dessert, I made a pair of castanets out of the pieces of a broken china plate, and danced a saraband so madly, so lasciviously, so furiously that it would have caused a saint to commit a mortal sin. My arms were rounded above my head, my legs flashed in a whirlwind of skirts, my hips were livelier than quicksilver; I bent backwards until I could almost touch the floor with my shoulders, I let my breasts swell up and out freely, and flavoured the whole performance with smiles and glances that would drive a

whole audience crazy if I ever dared dance in that way upon the stage. The Marquis beamed with satisfaction, feeling proud as a king at possessing such a mistress as I; but, all the same, the next day he was dull, languid, and disinclined to do anything. I tried my strongest philters upon him, but alas! they had lost their power. This state of things appeared to surprise him; he looked at me sometimes as if he were striving to recognise some one else in me. Can he have taken me, I asked myself, to personify his remembrance of some one else, and did I recall some lost love to him? No, I answered; such melancholy fancifulness does not consort with his character. Empty dreams of that kind may suit bilious hypochondriacs, but not a high-liver with rosy gills and ruddy complexion."

"Was it not satiety?" asked Blazius. "For ambrosia itself ends by palling on the taste, and the gods descend upon earth to taste the coarse bread of men."

"Learn, you stupid fellow," retorted Zerbina, administering a little tap on the Pedant's hand, "that one can never tire of me. You said so yourself just now."

"Forgive me, Zerbina, and tell us the cause of the Marquis's tantrums. I long to know it."

"Well," went on the maid, "by dint of turning the matter over I managed to understand what was the trouble that spoiled the Marquis's happiness, and I discovered which was the crumpled rose-leaf that made this Sybarite of mine sigh on his voluptuous couch. He possessed the woman, but he longed for the actress. The brilliant aspect we have under the blaze of the lights, and to which rouge and powder, dresses and costumes, the diversity and the action of our parts contribute, had vanished like the empty splendour of the stage when the lamp-man blows out the candles. By leaving the boards I had, so far as he was concerned, lost a portion of my attraction. He had Zerbina only, and it was Lisette, Marton, Marinette, he had fallen in love with; the flashing glance and the quick smile, the prompt repartee, the saucy look, the fanciful dress, the admiration and the desire of the public. He was trying to make out my stage face under my society features; for we actresses, unless we happen to be ugly, possess two different forms of beauty, the one made up, the other natural: a mask and a face. And pretty as the face may be, it is the mask that men often prefer. What the Marquis wanted was the soubrette he had seen in 'The Rodomontades of Captain Hector,'

while he found her but partially in me. The caprice that binds certain noblemen to actresses is far less sensual than is generally believed; it is the talent rather than the body that attracts them. They hope to grasp the ideal when clasping the real in their arms, but the image they pursue escapes from them. An actress is like a painting that must be looked at from a distance and in the right light. If one draws too near, the charm is dispelled. I too was beginning to feel bored. I had very often wished to be loved by a nobleman, to have rich dresses, to enjoy without care the refinements and pleasures of luxury, and I had often cursed the hard fate that compelled me, in the course of my life of wandering player, to wander from town to village and village to town in a waggon, melting in summer, freezing in winter. I kept watching for an opportunity to get away from that wretched existence, never suspecting that it was the very thing I was best fitted for, that it was the reason of my being, my talent, my poetry, my charm, and my particular attraction. But for that beam of art which gilds me somewhat, I should be no more then a vulgar strumpet like other women. Thalia, the virgin goddess, protects me by making me wear her livery, and the lines of the poets, coals of living fire,

cleanse my lips, as they touch them, of many a lascivious and mincing kiss.

"So it was that I understood my worthy nobleman was in love, not with my eyes, my teeth, and my skin only, but even more with that little spark which shines in me and wins me applause. Therefore, one fine morning I told him plainly that I meant to go free again, as it did not in the least suit me to remain for ever a nobleman's mistress; that any other woman might do it, and that he had best gracefully grant me leave to depart. I added, of course, that I loved him very tenderly, and that I was deeply grateful to him for all his kindness. At first he was surprised, but not annoyed, and after thinking for a few moments, he said, 'What are you going to do, my pet?' To which I answered that I meant to catch up the company or join it in Paris, if it had already reached the capital. 'I mean to resume my soubrette's parts,' I said, 'for it is ever so long since I have taken in old fools.' Whereat he laughed. 'Well, off with you!' he said. 'Go on ahead with the train of mules, which I place at your service; I shall follow you soon. Some business I have neglected requires my presence at Court, and I have been so long in the country that I am growing

rusty. You must allow me to come and applaud you, and I hope that if I come to knock at the door of your dressing-room, I may be permitted to enter.' I assumed a dear little look of modesty not at all calculated to drive him to despair, as I returned, 'Oh! Marquis, what a thing to ask!' To cut a long story short, after taking most tender leave of him, I jumped upon my mule, and here I am in 'The French Arms.'"

"But," said Herod, with a shade of anxiety, "suppose your Marquis should not turn up, you would be terribly disappointed."

The notion struck Zerbina as so utterly comical that she lay back in her arm-chair and laughed loud and long, holding her sides.

"The Marquis not turn up!" she cried when she had somewhat regained her composure. "Why, you may engage his room beforehand. My only fear was that his ardour might have brought him here before me. So, so, you Tyrant as stupid as you are cruel, you doubt the power of my charms? It is plain that your tragedies are deadening your reason; you used to be brighter in the old days."

Leander and Scappino, who had learned from the servants of Zerbina's arrival, now entered and paid

her their compliments. Soon after came in dame Leonardo, whose owl eyes flashed at the sight of the gold and gems spread out upon the table. She behaved towards Zerbina with the most sickening obsequiousness. Isabella also made her appearance, and Zerbina graciously presented her with a piece of taffeta. Serafina alone remained shut up in her room, her self-love not having forgiven the maid for the inexplicable preference the Marquis had shown the latter.

Zerbina was told of the freezing to death of Captain Hector on the road, and of his place having been taken by Baron de Sigognac, who had adopted for a stage name the very appropriate title of Captain Fracasse.

"It will be a great honour for me to play with a nobleman whose ancestors went to the Crusades," said Zerbina, "and I hope respect will not kill my spirit. It is lucky that I am used now to men of rank."

Just then Sigognac entered. Zerbina bent in a way to make her skirts balloon well out, and performed a court curtsey of the most ceremonious and correct order.

"This," she said, "is for his lordship, Baron de Sigognac, and this for my comrade Captain Fracasse,"

kissing him at the same time very promptly first on one cheek and then on the other, in a way to discompose Sigognac, who was not yet used to such stage liberties, and who, besides, was upset by Isabella's presence.

Zerbina's return enabled the repertory to be varied in pleasant fashion, and the whole company, save Serafina, was delighted to have her back.

And now that she is comfortably installed in her room, with her jolly companions around her, let me hark back to Orestes and Pylades, whom I left returning into the mansion after their walk in the garden.

Orestes, or, properly speaking, the young Duke de Vallombreuse, for such was his title, trifled with his food and more than once left untasted the glass that the lackey had filled, so deeply was he preoccupied with the thought of the lovely creature he had seen at the window. His confidant, the Chevalier de Vidaline, tried in vain to divert him; Vallombreuse replied only by monosyllables to the friendly pleasantries of his Pylades.

As soon as the dessert had been cleared away, the Chevalier said to the Duke: —

"Short-lived fancies are the safest, and the best way

of getting that beauty out of your mind, is to secure possession of her. She will speedily be in the same case as Corisande. You are just like those sportsmen who care only for the tracking and killing of the game, and let it lie once they have brought it down. I shall start on a beating expedition, to drive the bird into your net."

"No," returned Vallombreuse, "I shall go myself; for, as you have truly said, I would follow up to the ends of the world the smallest game, whether fur or feather, no matter how often checked and even at the cost of dying of fatigue. Do not deprive me of that pleasure. I do really believe that if I were fortunate enough to come upon a woman that would resist me, I should fall down and worship her, but there is none such upon this earth."

"But for the fact that your successes are well known," said Vidaline, "you might be taxed with conceit for speaking in such fashion, but your boxes filled with love-letters, portraits, love-knots, withered flowers, locks of black, golden, and auburn hair, and other proofs of love, prove that you are modest enough even when you speak as now. It may be that you will have your wish this time, for the lady at the

window struck me as being marvellously well-behaved, cold, and modest."

"Well, we shall see. Master Bilot is a willing talker, but he is also a good listener and knows the story of every one who puts up at his inn. Let us go and drink a glass of Canary there. I shall manage to make him talk, and he shall inform us concerning this travelling infanta."

A few minutes later the two young men entered "The French Arms" and called for Master Bilot. The worthy Boniface, aware of the rank of his guests, showed them into a lower room, comfortably tapestried, and in the chimney-place of which blazed a bright, crackling fire. He took from the cellarer's hands the bottle gray with dust and covered with cobwebs, removed its wax hood with infinite precautions, extracted the close-fitting cork from the neck without shaking the contents of the bottle, and with a hand as steady as if it had been cast in bronze, poured a thread of liquor golden as the topaz into the spiral wine-glasses of Venetian glass held by the Duke and the Chevalier. While thus performing the duties of cup-bearer, Bilot affected a religious gravity; he looked like a priest of Bacchus performing the mysterious rites of the divine

bottle; all he needed was to be crowned with ivy or vine leaves. This ceremoniousness added to the value of the wine he served, but apart from that it was really very good and worthier of a royal table than of an inn.

He was about to withdraw, when Vallombreuse, with a mysterious wink, stopped him on the threshold.

"Master Bilot," said he, "take a glass from the dresser, and drink my health in a bumper of this wine."

The tone in which this was said did not allow of any refusal; besides, Bilot did not require to be pressed to aid a guest to consume the treasures in his cellar. He lifted his glass with a bow, and drank down the contents to the last drop. "Good wine," said he, with a clucking of the tongue. Then he remained standing, his hand resting on the edge of the table, his eyes fixed on the Duke, waiting to know what the latter wanted with him.

"Have you many guests in your inn?" asked Vallombreuse. "And what sort of people are they?"

Bilot was opening his lips to reply, when the young Duke anticipated his answer and went on: —

"But what is the use of beating about the bush with an old rascal like you. Who is the woman that occu-

pies the room which looks out on the lane opposite Vallombreuse House; the third window from the corner of the wall? Reply quickly, and you shall have a gold piece for every syllable."

"At that rate," said Bilot with a jolly laugh, "a man would have to be more than virtuous if he used the laconic style so greatly favoured by the ancients. Yet, as I am wholly devoted to your grace, I shall speak but a single word: Isabella."

"Isabella! A lovely and romantic name," said Vallombreuse. "But do not resort to Lacedemonian brevity; be prolix, and tell me in detail all you know about that charmer."

"I yield to your grace's orders," said Bilot, bowing. "My cellar, my kitchen, and my tongue are at your lordship's disposal. Isabella is an actress who belongs to the company of Master Herod, lodging for the nonce at the Hotel of 'The French Arms.'"

"An actress," said the young Duke, with an accent of disappointment. "I took her, thanks to her discreet and reserved manner, for a lady of rank or a rich citizen's wife rather than for a strolling player."

"The mistake is a natural one," went on Bilot. "The young lady has very good manners. She plays

the part of a bashful maiden on the stage and keeps to it when off the boards. Her virtue, though in great danger, for she is pretty, is untarnished and she might well wear the virgin's snood. No one better understands how to dismiss a suitor by icy politeness that leaves absolutely no room for hope."

"I like that," said Vallombreuse, "for there is nothing I hate so much as too ready victims, and strongholds that sound a parley and purpose to capitulate even before the storming has been ordered."

"It would take more than one assault to carry this particular citadel," said Bilot, "although you are a bold and brilliant captain little accustomed to meet with resistance; for it is guarded by the vigilant sentinel of a chaste love."

"So the modest Isabella has a lover!" cried the young Duke, in a tone of mingled triumph and annoyance; for if, on the one hand, he did not much believe in the virtue of women, on the other, he was annoyed to learn that he had a rival.

"I said 'love,' not 'lover'," went on the innkeeper, insisting respectfully, "which is not the same thing. Your grace is much too expert in matters amatory not to appreciate the difference, subtile though it may

appear to be. A woman who has had one lover is likely to have another, as the song says, but a woman in love cannot be overcome, or at least only with the greatest difficulty, for she already has what is offered her."

"You argue," said Vallombreuse, "as if you had studied the Courts of love and Petrarca's sonnets. I thought your learning was confined to sauces and wines. Now tell me who is the object of that platonic tenderness."

"A member of the company," returned Bilot, "who I am inclined to think, joined them through love, for he has not the looks of an ordinary comedian."

"Well," said the Chevalier de Vidaline to his friend, "you have reason to be satisfied; here are unexpected obstacles cropping up. A virtuous actress is not to be met with every day, and your task is cut out for you. It will be a change from ladies of rank and courtesans."

"You are sure," continued the young Duke, following out the train of his thoughts, "that the chaste Isabella does not allow that young fop, whom I already detest from the bottom of my soul, to take any liberties with her?"

"It is plain that your Grace does not know her," returned Master Bilot. "She is an ermine that would die rather than stain her white fur. When she has to be kissed in the play, you can see her redden under the rouge and brush away the kiss with the back of her hand."

"Here is to the proud and stand-off beauty, who will not allow herself to be mastered!" cried the young Duke. "I shall master her in such good fashion that she will have to pace, amble, trot, gallop, and curvet as I please."

"You will get nothing in that way, my lord Duke, if I may make bold to say so," said the Boniface, bowing most humbly, as befitted a man of inferior position venturing to contradict a superior separated from him by so many rounds of the social ladder.

"I have a mind to send her, in a handsome chagreen case, ear-rings of large pearls, a gold necklace of many rows with jewelled clasps, and a bracelet in the shape of a serpent with two big balas rubies for the eyes."

"She would return all these fine things to you, and tell you that you had mistaken her for some one else. She is not self-seeking, like most women in her condition, and her eyes, for a wonder, considering her sex,

do not light up at the sight of sparkling jewellery. She looks upon diamonds in the finest settings as though they were no better than so many medlars laid on straw."

"A strange and curious specimen of the sex, by my faith," said the Duke de Vallombreuse, somewhat astonished. "No doubt she makes use of that show of virtue to induce that rascal to marry her, for I suppose he is well off. Women of that class are sometimes seized with the fancy of becoming the mothers of honest people and of sitting down at assemblies among reputable ladies, their eyes modestly cast down with the most demure look in the world."

"You had better marry her, then," said Vidaline, laughing, "seeing there is no better way. The title of duchess softens the hardest-hearted."

"Not so fast," returned Vallombreuse. "You are hurrying matters rather too much. First let us parley, and let me devise some stratagem which shall allow me to approach the beauty without frightening her away."

"That is easier than making her love you," put in Master Bilot. "There is to be a rehearsal in the tennis-court to-night of the play to be performed to-morrow. A number of theatre lovers in this city are to

be admitted, and all you have to do is to give your name to be at once admitted. Besides, I shall mention the matter to my friend Herod, who never says no to me. However, if I had anything to say in this matter, I should have suggested your addressing your vows to Mlle. Serafina, who is no less lovely than Isabella, and whose vanity would have been tickled to death at being singled out by you."

"It is Isabella I am smitten with," replied the Duke, in the dry tone he knew so well how to take and that put an end to any further remarks. "It is Isabella I am crazy about, and none else, Master Bilot."

Then putting his hand in his pocket, he threw carelessly on the table a string of gold pieces, adding: —

"Take the price of the bottle out of that, and keep the change."

The innkeeper picked up the coins with a smug look and slipped them one after another into his purse. The two noblemen rose, pulled their beavers well down over their eyes, threw the ends of their cloaks over one shoulder, and left the room. Vallombreuse walked several times up and down the street, looking up every time he passed under the particular window, but all in vain. Isabella, now on her guard, did not show her-

self; she had drawn her curtain close and the room might have been thought empty. Tired of dancing attendance in a deserted lane in a very cool wind, a performance he was quite unused to, the Duke soon wearied of his vain expectations and retraced his steps to his mansion, cursing the impertinent prudery of the wench who dared to keep a young and handsome nobleman at arm's length. He even bestowed a kindly thought upon poor Corisande, recently so disdained; but his self-love whispered to him that all he needed to do was to show himself and he would conquer as swiftly as did Cæsar. As for the rival, if he proved to be in the way, he would get rid of him by means of a few bravoes or cut-throats, his own sense of dignity forbidding his measuring himself with a fellow of that class.

It is true that Vallombreuse had been unable to catch sight of Isabella, who had withdrawn to the farthest part of her room, but while he had been marching up and down the lane, an eye had been watching him jealously through the panes of another window; it was Sigognac, greatly annoyed by the performances and the carryings-on of the gentleman. Time and again the Baron felt tempted to descend and

attack the young blade sword in hand, but he managed to restrain himself. There was nothing positively insulting in the mere fact of the Duke walking in the lane that would justify such aggression, and Sigognac would assuredly have laid himself open to the charge of acting in a foolish and ridiculous manner. Then the scandal it would have caused would have injured the reputation of Isabella, who was wholly unaware of the glances shot upwards invariably in the same place. Nevertheless, Sigognac promised to himself to keep his eye on the swain, whose features he imprinted in his memory in order to be sure to recognise him again in time of need.

For the next day's performance, which had been duly advertised by sound of drum through the whole town, Herod had chosen "Lygdamon and Lydias, or the Resemblance," a tragi-comedy by a certain George de Scudéry, gentleman, who, after having served in the French guards, had given up the sword for the pen and used the one as skilfully as the other. It was to be followed by "The Rodomontades of Captain Fracasse," in which Sigognac was to make his first appearance before a real public, having played as yet only before the calves, horned animals, and peasants in

Bellombre's barn. All the actors were very busy learning their parts ; Scudéry's play having been brought out but recently, they were not acquainted with it. Abstracted and sticking out their mouths like chattering monkeys, they walked up and down the gallery, sometimes muttering their lines, sometimes shouting them out. Any one seeing them thus engaged would have taken them for lunatics. They would stop short, then start again, striding along and whirling their arms about like the sails of windmills. Leander, in particular, having to play Lygdamon, was trying various attitudes, seeking effects and jumping about like a pea on a hot gridiron. He counted on his part to realise his dream of making some great lady fall in love with him and enable him to have his revenge for the thrashing he had received at the Castle of Bruyères, a thrashing that stuck in his gizzard long after its effects on his back had ceased to make themselves felt. His part, which was that of a bashful, sentimental lover, uttering fine sentiments at the feet of a cruel beauty in fairly well-turned lines, gave opportunities for lovelorn glances, sighs, palings of the face and all manner of moving affectations wherein mainly excelled Master Leander, one of the

leading lovers in the provinces, in spite of his pretensions and his ridiculous ways.

Sigognac, whom Blazius had undertaken to coach, had shut himself up in his room with the old comedian and was busy studying the difficult art of the actor. The type he represented was far removed from nature by its extravagantly exaggerated character, yet he had to make the truth felt through the exaggeration and to enable the man to be perceived under the oddity. Blazius was advising him to do this, and taught him to begin in a simple and truthful manner in order to break out into queer intonations, or again to resume his ordinary tone of voice after having screamed like a fowl that is being plucked alive; for no one, however affected, is constantly so. Besides, inequalities of this sort are the distinguishing trait of lunatics and crack-brained people, and mark their gestures also, these not agreeing with the meaning of the words, a discord from which a clever actor can draw comic effects. Blazius was of opinion that Sigognac should wear a half-mask, that is, one concealing the forehead and nose, in order to keep within the traditional figure, and to mingle the real with the fanciful in his face; which is of great advantage in such half-true, half-fanciful

parts, broad caricatures of humanity which men do not quarrel with. In the hands of a vulgar actor, a part of this sort may well prove to be no more than a sorry piece of buffoonery fit to please the rabble only and to disgust well-bred people, but an actor of merit can introduce into it touches that hold the mirror up to nature better than if they were prearranged.

Sigognac rather liked the notion of the half-mask, for it secured his incognito, and gave him courage to face the crowd. The little bit of cardboard, it seemed to him, would be like the lowered visor of a helm, through which he could speak with a ghostly voice. For the face of man is the man himself; the body is anonymous, and a hidden face cannot be recognised. This arrangement conciliated the respect he owed to his ancestors and the necessities of his situation. He would no longer face the footlights in direct and material fashion. He would be but the unknown soul animating a big puppet, *nervis alienis mobile lignum*; only, he would be dwelling within the puppet itself instead of merely pulling the strings of it from outside. There was nothing in this to offend his dignity.

Blazius, who had become much attached to Sigognac, himself modelled the mask so as to make up a stage

face wholly different from his real one. A turned-up nose, studded with warts and red as a cherry at the tip, eyebrows in the shape of circumflex accents, the ends curving up like commas, a mustache with pointed ends that curled upwards like the horns of the moon, made the features of the young Baron wholly unrecognisable. This mask, put on like a chamfron, covered the brow and nose only, but completely changed the aspect of the rest of the face.

They repaired to the rehearsal, which was to be in full dress, to get an idea of the general effect. In order not to have to go through the streets like a lot of masqueraders, the players had sent on their costumes to the tennis-court, and the ladies dressed in the room I have described. The people of quality, the young blades, and the wits of the place had striven with might and main to be allowed to enter within this temple, or sacristy rather, of Thalia, in which the priestesses of the Muse were putting on their apparel to celebrate the mysteries, and all crowded round the actresses. Some held hand-glasses for them; others placed the candles nearer so that they might have a better light; one man gave his opinion as to the place where a knot of ribbon should be put; another held the puff-box; a

third, more timid, remained seated on a coffer, swinging his legs, uttering no word and twisting his mustache by way of giving himself a countenance.

Each of the actresses had her own circle of courtiers whose greedy eyes sought opportunities of satisfying their desires in the chances and accidents of the toilet. Sometimes the wrapper, slipping away most timeously, allowed a glimpse of a back lustrous as marble; sometimes a swelling breast, rivalling the whiteness of snow or ivory, rebelled against the tyranny of the corset and had to be pressed back within its nest of lace, or else a handsome arm, raised to adjust the head-dress, was seen bare to the shoulder. There is no need to say how madrigals, compliments, and mythological commonplaces were drawn from the country bumpkins by the sight of such charms. Zerbina laughed loud and long as she listened to all their nonsense; Serafina, who was more conceited than she was clever, revelled in it, while Isabella paid no attention to it, and dressed in modest fashion under the gaze of the men, refusing politely but coldly the offers of service pressed upon her by the gallants.

Vallombreuse, followed by his friend Vidalinc, did not fail to make use of the opportunity to see Isabella.

He thought she was even more lovely when seen close by than when beheld at a distance, and his passion increased all the more. The young Duke had bestowed particular pains upon his dress in view of the event, and as a matter of fact, he was remarkably handsome. He wore a splendid costume of white satin, with puffings and trimmings of cherry colour, and knots of ribbons of the same shade fastened with diamond drops. A mass of fine linen and lace emerged from the sleeves of his doublet; his sword hung from a rich silken scarf, and in his hand, encased in gloves scented with frangipani, he carried a white beaver with flame-coloured plume.

His long black hair, curled in small ringlets, framed in the perfect oval of his face and brought out its warm pallor. Under his small mustache his lips glowed like pomegranates, and his eyes flashed between their long, thick lashes. His neck, round and white like a pillar of marble, proudly supported his head and rose freely out of a priceless cravat of Venetian point lace.

Nevertheless there was something unpleasant in all this perfection. His clean, delicate, noble features were spoiled by an anti-human expression, if such an

epithet be permissible. It was plain that the joys and sorrows of mankind had but little effect upon the owner of that pitilessly handsome face. He evidently considered, and in point of fact, did believe himself to be of a different species.

Vallombreuse stood quietly near Isabella's dressing-table, resting his arm upon the frame of the mirror, in such a manner that the actress's eyes, having to turn to it constantly, should be compelled to look at him. It was a clever move, fair enough in love, and that no doubt would have proved successful in any other case. He meant to overwhelm her with his beauty of person, his proud mien, and his splendid dress before he spoke to her.

Isabella, who had recognised in him the bold youth in the lane, and who was troubled by the imperious fire of his glance, preserved the utmost reserve and kept her eyes fixed upon the glass. She seemed to be utterly unconscious of the fact that one of the handsomest nobles in France had taken up his position by her; but then she was an uncommon sort of young lady.

Tiring of his attitude, Vallombreuse made up his mind abruptly and said to her: —

"You play Sylvia, do you not, Miss, in M. de Scudéry's 'Lygdamon and Lydias'?"

"Yes, sir," answered Isabella, who could not avoid replying to so commonplace a question.

"It will never have been better played," went on Vallombreuse. "If it is a poor part, you will make it good, and if it be a good one, you will make it excellent. Happy the poets whose lines are spoken by lips such as yours!"

Such meaningless compliments were no more than the fair words which polite people are wont to address to actresses, and Isabella had perforce to accept them. She thanked the Duke with a very slight bow.

Sigognac, having, thanks to the assistance of Blazius, finished dressing in the small dressing-room of the tennis-court, now returned into the actresses' room to await the beginning of the performance. He was masked, and had already buckled on the belt of the long rapier, with the heavy shell-hilt and the cobweb, inherited from the unfortunate Hector. His scarlet cape, slashed on the edges, hung quaintly on his shoulders, the end cocked up by the end of the rapier. With the object of getting into the spirit of his part, he strode in, throwing the hip well forward, his legs as

far apart as the legs of a pair of dividers, and an insulting and provocative mien, as befitted a Captain Fracasse.

"You are really very well made up," said Isabella, as he drew near to pay her his compliments, "and never did Spanish Hector look more splendidly arrogant."

The Duke de Vallombreuse looked the new-comer, to whom the young actress spoke so sweetly, up and down with the most haughty disdain.

"Apparently this is the fellow with whom she is reported to be in love," said he to himself in bitterness of spirit, for he could not comprehend that any woman should hesitate for a moment to prefer the young and splendid Duke de Vallombreuse to so absurd a character.

He deliberately pretended, however, to ignore the presence of Sigognac, whom he looked upon as no more than a piece of furniture. So far as he was concerned, Sigognac was only a thing, and not a man, and the Duke behaved precisely as if he had been alone, gazing full upon Isabella with burning glances that rested upon the upper part of her breasts which showed through the opening of the chemisette.

Isabella, troubled by his stare, felt herself blushing, in spite of herself, under his fixed looks, that burned her like molten lead, and she hastened to complete her toilet in order to avoid them; urged on also by seeing Sigognac, plainly wrathy, clutching convulsively at the handle of his sword.

She placed a patch upon the corner of her lips, and made ready to rise and proceed to the stage, for the Tyrant had already bellowed several times: "Are you ready, ladies?"

"Allow me, Miss," said the Duke; "you have forgotten to put on a heart-breaker."

And dipping into the patch-box placed upon the dressing-table, Vallombreuse picked out a little black patch in the shape of a star.

"Permit me to put it on for you," he went on; "just here, near your bosom, the natural whiteness of which it will set off, and look like a real mole."

He joined the act to the words so swiftly that Isabella, startled, had barely time to throw herself back in her chair to avoid the insolent touch of his hand. The Duke, however, was not a man easily put out, and his finger, with the patch upon it, was just about to press the girl's bosom, when his arm

was seized in an iron grasp that closed upon it like a vise.

The Duke de Vallombreuse, mad with rage, looked round and saw Captain Fracasse standing in an attitude utterly unlike that of a comedy poltroon.

"My lord Duke," said Fracasse, still keeping hold of Vallombreuse's arm, "this young lady puts on her patches herself, and needs no one's services."

Whereupon he let go the arm of the young nobleman, whose first impulse was to draw his sword. At this moment Vallombreuse, handsome as he was, exhibited a mien more grim and formidable than that of Medusa herself. A dreadful pallor overspread his features; his black eyebrows were lowered over his bloodshot eyes; his red lips turned purple and were mottled with foam; and he breathed hard as if scenting carnage. He sprang at Sigognac, who budged not an inch, awaiting his attack; but he stopped short, a sudden reflection stilling his frantic energy like a douche of ice-cold water. His features relaxed, his colour returned; he had completely regained his self-control, and his face expressed the iciest disdain, the supremest contempt of one creature for another. It had just flashed across his mind that his adversary was of low

birth, and that he had nearly involved himself in a quarrel with a stroller. His aristocratic pride revolted at the thought. An insult from one of such low degree could not affect him. No man fights the mud that has splashed upon him. Nevertheless, as it was not in his nature to allow an offence to go unpunished, no matter whence it came, he approached Sigognac and said to him : —

" You scoundrel, I shall have you thrashed by my servants ! "

" You had better beware of doing so, my lord Duke," said Sigognac very quietly and as if the matter did not concern him in the least. " You had better beware. My bones are hard, and the sticks of your fellows would smash like glass upon them. It is on the stage only that I allow myself to receive blows."

" Insolent though you are, you hound, I shall not do you the honour of thrashing you myself. Such ambition is far beyond your merits," returned Vallombreuse.

" We shall see about that, my lord Duke," replied Sigognac. " It may be that being less proud than you, I shall thrash you with my own hands."

"I do not reply to masked people," said the Duke, taking the arm of Vidaline who had drawn near.

"You shall see my face, my lord, at the proper time and place, and I fancy you will like it less even than my false nose. But let that suffice. I hear the bell ringing, and I should run the risk of missing my cue if I delayed longer."

The players admired his courage, but, as they were aware of the Baron's rank, they were not as much surprised by it as the other witnesses to the scene, who were aghast at his audacity. Isabella had been so frightened that the powder had come off her face, and Zerbina, seeing how dreadfully pale she had become, had to rouge her up heavily. She could scarcely stand, and had not the maid supported her by the elbow she would have fallen flat on making her entrance upon the stage. Most unpleasant was it to sweet, good, and modest Isabella to be the subject of a quarrel, for she dreaded above all things attracting attention and exciting remark, well knowing that these are always hurtful to a woman's character. Besides, although quite determined not to yield to her passion, she loved Sigognac tenderly, and the idea of his being exposed to an ambush, or to a duel at the least,

pained her more than she would have cared to own.

In spite of the incident, the rehearsal was duly carried out, for players are not to be diverted from their fictitious passions by the emotions of real life. Isabella herself played particularly well, although her heart was full of care. Fracasse, excited by the quarrel, was simply brilliant, carrying everything before him. Zerbina surpassed herself; every one of her hits raised storms of laughter and prolonged applause. From the corner of the orchestra came applause that was heard before any other and lasted until all the rest had stopped; the enthusiastic persistence of it at last attracted Zerbina's attention. Under the pretence of by-play she stepped close up to the footlights, craned her neck forward like an inquisitive bird peering out between the leaves, looked into the auditorium and caught sight of the Marquis de Bruyères, crimson with satisfaction, and his eyes, flashing with desire, shining like carbuncles. He had come upon the Lisette, the Marton, and the Smeraldina of his dreams once more. He was in the seventh heaven of happiness.

"The Marquis is here," whispered Zerbina to Blazius, who was playing Pandolfo, between two

parts of their dialogue, in that mute voice which actors use on the stage to talk to each other when they do not wish to be heard by the public. "See how he chortles. He is radiant with delight, and mad with desire. He can scarcely keep still, and were it not for very shame, he would jump the foot-lights and kiss me before the whole audience. So, so, Marquis de Bruyères, you are fond of stage maids, are you? Well, you shall have one of them, highly seasoned too."

From that moment, Zerbina exerted all her powers and played as if she were possessed. She fairly blazed with gaiety, wit, and ardour, and the Marquis felt that henceforth he could not possibly do without that bitter-sweet sensation. Every other woman who had ever granted him favours and whom he mentally compared with Zerbina, seemed to him colourless, savourless, and wearisome.

The play by Scudéry, which was next rehearsed, gave pleasure, though it was less amusing, and Leander, who played the part of Lygdamon, was delightful in it. But instead of talking of the talent of my players, let me leave them and return to the Duke de Vallombreuse and his friend Vidaline.

COMPLICATIONS ARISE

Transported with rage after the scene in which he had not carried off the honours, the young Duke had returned to Vallombreuse House with his confidant, turning over innumerable projects of vengeance, of which the mildest was a resolve to have the insolent Captain thrashed to death.

Vidaline endeavoured, but unsuccessfully, to quiet him; the Duke wrung his hands in his anger and stormed about the room like a lunatic, striking at the arm-chairs, that tumbled over in comical fashion with their legs in the air, upsetting the tables, and doing, while giving vent to his fury, a terrible deal of damage. Finally he seized a vase of Japanese porcelain and hurled it to the floor, where it broke into a thousand pieces.

"Oh!" he cried, "I wish I could smash that insolent scoundrel just in the same way, trample upon him, and sweep his remains on to a dirt-heap! A villain who dares to come between me and the object of my desires! If only he were a gentleman, I would fight him with sword, dagger, or pistol, on foot or on horseback, until I set my foot on his chest and spat in his dead face!"

"I should not wonder if he were a gentleman," said Vidaline. "Indeed I am inclined to think his assurance proves it. Bilot mentioned that one of the

players had joined the company for love, and that Isabella looked favourably upon him. He must be the man, if I may judge by his jealousy and the young woman's emotion."

"What an idea!" returned Vallombreuse. "Do you suppose that a man of rank would mingle with strollers like these, walk the boards, paint his face, and stand being slapped and kicked? No, it is utterly out of the question."

"Jupiter did transform himself into an animal and even into a husband in order to enjoy the possession of mortal woman," answered Vidalinc; "and for a god, that was coming down a good deal more than turning comedian is for a nobleman."

"No matter," said the Duke, striking a gong. "I shall first punish the stroller, and later I shall punish the man, supposing there be such a thing behind that ridiculous mask."

"You need feel no doubt about that," exclaimed Vidalinc. "His eyes blazed under the hair of his false brows, and in spite of his vermilion nose, he looked majestic and formidable, — no easy matter in such a costume."

"All the better, then," returned the Duke, "for in

that case my vengeance will not expend itself in the void, and will find a breast into which to plunge."

A servant entered, bowed low, and remained motionless awaiting his master's orders.

"Call up, if they have gone to bed, Basque, Azolan, Mérindol, and Labriche. Tell them to provide themselves with stout cudgels and to go and await at the door of the tennis-court, where Herod's players are performing, a certain Captain Fracasse. Let them charge him, and thrash him into insensibility, without going the length of killing him, however; else it might be supposed I was afraid of the man. I shall be responsible for the consequences. And when they are thrashing him, let them call out to him, 'This from the Duke de Vallombreuse!' so that he may know well whence it comes."

This somewhat ferocious order did not appear to surprise the lackey greatly, and he withdrew, assuring the Duke that his Grace's orders should be at once carried out.

"I own," said Vidalinc, when the servant had withdrawn, "that I regret your having that player treated in such fashion, for, after all, he showed a spirit above his profession. Let me go and pick a quarrel with

him on some pretext or other, and kill him off for you. All blood is red when it is let out, although that of nobles is said to be blue. I am of a good old family, though of not such high rank as you, and my susceptibility does not fear being endangered. Say the word, and I am off. That captain seems to me worthier of the sword than of the cudgel."

"I thank you," said the Duke, "for your offer, which is a proof of your thorough devotion to my interests, yet I cannot accept it. The beast dared to lay hands upon me, and it is right that he should expiate his crime ignominiously. If he should prove to be a man of rank, he will readily enough be answered, for I always reply to those who put their questions at the sword's point."

"As you please, Duke," said Vidaline, stretching his feet out upon a footstool, with the air of a man who is compelled to let matters take their course. "And by the way, do you know that that Serafina is charming? I paid her a few sugared compliments, and I have already obtained a rendezvous with her. Old Bilot was right."

Then the Duke and his friend, relapsing into silence, awaited the return of the bullies.

IX

SWORD PLAY, CUDGEL PLAY AND OTHER ADVENTURES

THE rehearsal was over and the players had withdrawn to their dressing-rooms to change into every-day dress. Sigognac did the same, but, anticipating an attack, he kept on the sword he wore in the part of Hector. It had a good old Spanish blade, as long as a day of starvation, with an open-work shell-hilt that thoroughly protected the wrist, and, handled by a brave man, was capable of parrying blows and returning them too, — though not mortal ones, for it was blunt and with dulled edge, as is the custom with stage weapons. Such as it was, however, it would amply suffice to punish the lackeys whom the Duke de Vallombreuse had ordered to avenge him.

Herod, a stout, broad-shouldered carle, armed himself with the cudgel he used to signal the raising of the curtain, and with this species of mace, which

he handled as if it were a straw, he undertook to soundly belabour any ruffians that might attack Sigognac; for it was not in his nature to leave his friends in the lurch.

"Captain," said he to the Baron, when they got into the street, "let the ladies, whose shrieks would deafen us, go on ahead of us under the escort of Leander and Blazius; the former is only a fop, cowardly as a hare, and the other is much too old, and his strength is not as great as his courage. Scappino shall stay with us, for no one can trip up a man in more deft fashion, and in less than a minute he will have laid out, like stuffed pigs, one or two of the rascals, — that is, assuming they attack us, — and in any event my cudgel shall back up your rapier."

"I thank you, my brave Herod," returned Sigognac; "such an offer as yours is not to be declined; but let us go warily, lest we be attacked unexpectedly. We shall walk in the middle of the street, at a short distance one behind another. These rascals, who are in ambush, are certainly keeping close to the wall in the shadow; they will have to come forth in order to reach us, and that will give us time to see them approach. Now, then, let me draw; do you brandish

your mace, and let Scappino work his muscles to make sure his legs work right."

Sigognac placed himself at the head of the party and advanced prudently into the lane that led from the tennis-court to "The French Arms." It was dark and tortuous, and very uneven; in a word, admirably suited to an ambuscade. No light came from the houses, in which everybody was sound asleep, and it happened that there was no moon that night.

Basque, Azolan, Mérindol, and Labriche, the young Duke's ruffians, had been waiting for more than half an hour until Captain Fracasse, who must necessarily come that way, should pass along. Azolan and Basque had hidden themselves in the recess of a door on the street side, while Mérindol and Labriche, standing close to the wall, had posted themselves right opposite, so that their cudgels should converge upon Sigognac's back, like the hammers of Cyclops. The group of women escorted by Leander and Blazius had warned them that Sigognac could not now be long coming, and they stood firmly planted, their hands clasping their cudgels, ready to do their duty, and utterly unsuspicious of the fact that they were in for a fight, — poets, players, and citizens, whom the great deign to

have thrashed, being accustomed to take their chastisement quietly, and being satisfied to bend their backs under the blows.

Sigognac, who was very sharp-sighted, had already, though the night was very dark, made out the four rascals in their ambush. He stopped as if about to retrace his steps. This feint deceived the four villains, who thought their prey was escaping them, and left their ambuscade to charge the Captain. Azolan was the first to spring forward, and they all shouted: "Kill him! kill him! This to Captain Fracasse from the Duke de Vallombreuse!"

Sigognac had wrapped his cloak round his left arm, making a sort of roll that was impervious to blows, and with which he parried the blow dealt him by Azolan, while at the same time he lunged at him with his rapier and struck him so fiercely in the chest that the wretch rolled into the gutter, his breast-bone smashed, his feet in the air, and his hat in the mud. Had the point not been dulled, the blade would have gone clean through him and come out between his shoulders. Basque, undeterred by his comrade's misfortune, stepped forward bravely, but a terrific sword-cut over the head broke his skull for him, and made

him see more stars than were shining on that night, which was dark as pitch. Herod's mace broke Mérindol's cudgel into flinders, and the fellow, finding himself disarmed, took to flight, though he could not avoid, quick as he was in taking to his heels, many a bruise inflicted by the mighty staff. As for Scappino, he clasped Labriche round the body so swiftly and so surely that the man, half choked, was unable to use his cudgel. Then forcing him on to his left arm, while at the same time he nearly broke his back with his right, he lifted him off the ground with a quick, sharp, irresistible cross-buttock and sent him flying to the ground a dozen yards away. Labriche struck the nape of his neck against a stone, and the blow was so tremendous that the Duke's ruffian swooned away on the field of battle, looking like a dead man.

The street was cleared, and victory was with the players; Azolan and Basque, crawling on all fours, were trying to reach an awning under which they might recover their senses. Labriche lay in the gutter like a drunken man, and Mérindol, the least hurt of the lot, had fled; no doubt in order that one at least might survive the disaster and be able to report it.

Nevertheless, as he drew near Vallombreuse House he slackened his steps, for he would have to face the anger of the young Duke, which he dreaded as much as Herod's staff. At the mere thought of it the perspiration streamed down his face, and he forgot the pain of his dislocated shoulder, from which his arm hung limp and inert like an empty sleeve.

He had scarcely re-entered the mansion when the Duke, impatient to learn the success of the attack, had him summoned. Mérindol entered with awkward and embarrassed mien, for his shoulder pained him greatly; he was turning pale and green in spite of the sunburn on his face, and his brow was wet with perspiration. He stood at the door motionless and silent, awaiting a word of encouragement or a question from the Duke, who, however, remained mute.

"Well," said the Chevalier de Vidaline at last, seeing that Vallombreuse was looking very grimly at Mérindol, "what news have you brought? Not very good, I fancy, for you do not look particularly happy."

"Your Grace," answered Mérindol, "knows that we are all zealous in the discharge of our duty, but on this occasion fortune has proved unpropitious."

"What do you mean?" said the Duke, with an angry gesture. "Have the four of you not managed to thrash that mummer?"

"That mummer, my lord," returned Mérindol, "is braver and more vigorous than the Hercules of fable. He rushed at us so fiercely that, turning assailant instead of being assailed, he laid out Azolan and Basque in a twinkling. Stout fellows though they be, they went down before him like straw. Labriche was disabled by another one of the actors who practised some trick of gymnastics upon him, and the nape of his neck has ascertained the hardness of the Poictiers paving-stones. For myself I had my cudgel smashed by the mace of Master Herod, and my shoulder dislocated so badly that I shall not be able to use my arm for a fortnight."

"You are a pack of calves, of louts; pitiful ruffians, devoid of skill, courage, and devotion!" roared the Duke de Vallombreuse, beside himself with rage. "Any old woman could put you to flight with her distaff. A pretty mistake I made in saving the lot of you from the galleys and the gallows. I might just as well have a number of honest fellows in my service; they could not possibly prove more cowardly or more incapable.

When you found that sticks would not do, you should have taken to your swords."

"Your Grace gave orders for a thrashing, and not for a murder," answered Mérindol, "and we would not have dared to take upon ourselves to do more."

"Well," said Vidalinc, breaking into laughter, "you are a mightily careful, precise, and conscientious rascal. I love to see such candour in one of your breed, I must say. This little adventure is starting off in fairly romantic fashion, and ought to be satisfactory to you, Vallombreuse, since you object to smoothly running intrigues and delight in obstacles. It seems to me that, for an actress, Isabella is hard to get at; she dwells in a tower that has no drawbridge, and which is guarded, like such towers in romances of chivalry, by dragons breathing out fire and smoke. But I see that our routed host has returned."

At this moment Azolan, Basque, and Labriche, who had recovered from his swoon, appeared at the door of the room, their hands outstretched in supplication towards the Duke. They were wan, and filthy with blood and mud, although they had received no worse wounds than contusions; but the violence of the blows had made them bleed at the nose, and the yellow

leather of their buff jerkins was shockingly stained with crimson splashes.

"Get back to your kennels, you hounds!" cried the Duke, who felt no sympathy for them, when his eyes fell upon the crippled company. "I have a great mind to have you thrashed for your stupidity and your cowardice. My chirurgeon shall examine you and report to me whether the wounds you complain of are serious, and if they are not, I shall have you skinned alive like eels. Away with you!"

The discomfited ruffians needed no second order and vanished as if they were unhurt, so great was the terror the young Duke inspired in the breasts of these bravoes, every one of them food for the hangman, and who were not naturally cowards.

When they had withdrawn, Vallombreuse threw himself on a pile of cushions and remained plunged in silence, which Vidaline refrained from breaking. Angry thoughts raged in his brain like black clouds driven by a furious wind across a stormy sky. He was minded to set fire to the inn, to kill Captain Fracasse, to drown the whole company of players. For the first time in his life he had met with resistance! He had ordered something to be done, and it had not been done! A

mere strolling actor had dared to affront him! His people had fled after being thrashed by a stage buffoon! His pride rose in revolt at the thought, and he felt as if stupefied. It was possible, then, that a man should actually stand up to him! Then he remembered that, though dressed in a splendid costume, glittering with diamonds, in all the glory of his beauty, he had been unable to obtain a single favourable glance from a mere chit of a girl, a strolling actress, a doll exposed every night to be hissed by the first boor that came along, — he, Vallombreuse, whom princesses welcomed with smiles, whom duchesses died of love for, and who had never yet met with a repulse. He gnashed his teeth with rage, and his hands tore at the splendid white satin doublet that he had not yet taken off, as if to punish it for having seconded him so ill in his plans for the seduction of the girl.

At last he rose abruptly, waved a farewell to his friend Vidalinc, and withdrew, without touching the supper that had just been served, into his bedroom, where sleep failed to close the damask curtains of his bed.

Vidalinc, his mind pleasantly filled with thoughts of Serafina, did not notice that he was supping alone, and

ate with a very good appetite. Then, cradled by voluptuous dreams in which the young actress figured invariably, he slept soundly until the next morning.

When Sigognac, Herod, and Scappino got back to the inn, they found the other players a prey to alarm. The shouts of "Kill! kill!" and the noise of the encounter had reached the ears of Isabella and her companions through the silence of night. The young girl had nearly fainted, and but for Blazius, who supported her, she would have sunk to the ground. Pale as wax and trembling all over, she was standing on the threshold of her room waiting for news. At the sight of Sigognac unwounded and whole, she uttered a faint cry, raised her arms to heaven and let them fall round the young man's neck, hiding her face against his shoulder with a lovely gesture of maidenly shame. Speedily mastering her emotion, however, she freed herself from his clasp, drew back, and resumed her usual reserve.

"You are sure you are not wounded?" she asked in her sweetest tones. "I should be so unhappy if harm came to you through me. But how rash of you to brave that handsome, wicked Duke, who has the glance and the pride of Lucifer, and all for the sake of a poor girl like me! You are not sensible, Sigognac;

now that you are a player like ourselves, you must learn to bear with certain impertinences."

"I shall never permit any one," answered Sigognac, "to insult the adorable Isabella in my presence, even though I wear the mask of a swashbuckler."

"Well spoken, Captain," said Herod. "Well spoken, and even better done. For by the rood, you did thrust fiercely at them. Lucky it was for these rascals that Hector's sword was dulled, else you would have cut them down from the head to the feet, as the knight-errants were wont to treat Saracens and enchanters."

"Your staff wrought as sturdily as did my rapier," returned Sigognac, paying Herod's compliment back, "and your conscience must be at rest, for it was not innocents whom you devoted to slaughter this time."

"Not by a good deal," answered the Tyrant, laughing loud out of his big black beard. "They are the very cream of the galleys, regular gallows-birds."

"It goes without saying," said Sigognac, "that such jobs cannot be undertaken by decent people. But we must not forget to celebrate as it deserves the heroic valour displayed by Scappino, who fought and con-

quered without other weapons than those nature has provided him with."

Scappino, who was a buffoon, humped himself up, as if swelling with the praise, put his hand on his heart, cast down his eyes, and made a comic bow full of modesty.

"I would have gladly accompanied you," said Blazius, "but my head wags on my shoulders, owing to my age, and I am only fit nowadays to handle jorums in a drinking bout."

Their talk over, the players, as it was getting late, withdrew each to his room, save Sigognac, who walked up and down the gallery for some time longer, as if revolving a project. The comedian was avenged, but not the nobleman. Was he to throw off the mask that secured his incognito, reveal his true name, and perhaps draw down upon his comrades the young Duke's anger? Common prudence urged him not to do so, but honour affirmed he should. The Baron could not resist this imperious voice, and walked towards Zerbina's room.

He knocked gently at the door, which was at first partially opened, but which opened fully at the mention of his name. The room was brilliantly lighted; handsome candelabra, filled with rose-coloured tapers, were

placed on a table covered with a symmetrically laid damask-cloth, upon which was set a choice supper served on silver plate. Two partridges, enwrapped in slices of golden bacon, stood in the centre of a circle of sliced oranges, and were flanked by blanc-manger and a forcemeat fish-pie, the triumph of Master Bilot's art. In a crystal flagon, dotted with gilt ornaments, sparkled ruby-coloured wine, with another similar companion flagon, filled with topaz-coloured wine. Places were laid for two, and when Sigognac entered, Zerbina was pledging the Marquis de Bruyères in a bumper. The Marquis's eyes were afire with a double intoxication, for never had the tricky Zerbina been more seductive, while, on the other hand, the Marquis held that Venus is apt to be benumbed unless she is accompanied by Ceres and Bacchus.

Zerbina bestowed upon Sigognac a graceful nod which united skilfully the familiarity of the actress towards her comrade and the respect of the woman for the nobleman.

"It is very kind of you," said the Marquis de Bruyères, "to come and surprise us in our lovers' retreat, and I hope that, without being afraid of breaking in upon our tête-à-tête, you will do us the pleasure

of taking supper with us. James, a plate for the Baron."

"I accept your courteous invitation," said Sigognac, "not because I am very hungry, but because I do not wish to interfere with your meal, and there is nothing so unpleasant as to have a guest who will not eat."

The Baron took the arm-chair placed for him by James opposite the Marquis and by Zerbina's side. M. de Bruyères helped him to the wing of a partridge, and filled his glass without asking a single question; for as a man of quality and high breeding, he had guessed that it must be a serious matter which had brought Sigognac, usually so reserved and unapproachable, to the room at that hour.

"Do you like red wine, or do you prefer white?" asked the Marquis. "For myself I drink both, so as not to excite any jealousy between them."

"I am naturally and by habit very moderate in my drinking," answered Sigognac, "and I temper Bacchus with nymphs, as the ancients used to say. The red wine will answer perfectly. But it is not for the purpose of feasting with you that I have trespassed upon your loves at this unseemly hour. I have come, Marquis, to ask of you a favour which one nobleman

never refuses to another. Mlle. Zerbina has no doubt told you that this evening, in the ladies' dressing-room, the Duke de Vallombreuse attempted to put his hand into Isabella's bosom, under pretext of putting on a patch, — a foul, lascivious, and brutal act, in no wise warranted by any coquetry or advances on the part of the young lady, who is as discreet as she is modest, and for whom I entertain the highest respect."

"And she fully deserves it," put in Zerbina; "though I am a woman and her comrade, I could not, even did I wish to do so, find a word to say against her."

"I caught hold of the Duke's arm," continued Sigognac, "and his Grace broke out in angry threats and invective to which I replied with sarcastic coolness, under the protection of my Hector disguise. The Duke threatened to have me thrashed by his lackeys, and kept his promise, for, as I was returning to the inn along a dark lane, four scoundrels rushed upon me. I laid out a couple of them with the flat of my sword, while Herod and Scappino punished the other two in proper fashion. Now, though the Duke imagined he had to deal with a poor player only, the player happens to be a nobleman, and the outrage cannot remain unpunished. You know who I am, Marquis, though

you have respected my wish to remain unknown; you know my family, and you can bear witness to the fact that the Sigognacs have been nobles for a thousand years, free from any low-born connections, and that not one of them ever suffered his honour to be attacked."

"Baron de Sigognac," said the Marquis de Bruyères, for the first time addressing his guest by his real name, "I am prepared to bear witness to the antiquity and noble rank of your family before whomsoever you please. Palamedes de Sigognac greatly distinguished himself in the first Crusade, leading one hundred lances on a galley fitted out at his own cost. That was at a time when many a nobleman who now boasts of his high estate did not count even an esquire among his forefathers. Palamedes was a great friend of Hugh de Bruyères, my ancestor, and they slept together in the same tent, like brothers in arms."

Sigognac looked up proudly as the Marquis recalled these glorious remembrances; the spirit of his ancestors stirred within him, and Zerbina, who was looking at him, was struck by the singular inward beauty, so to speak, that illumined, like the reflection of a fire, the Baron's usually sad face.

"These noblemen," said she to herself, "seem to have sprung from the loins of Jupiter; the least word stirs up their pride, and they are unable to swallow an insult as do ordinary people. All the same, if the Baron were to look at me in that way, I should be quite willing to be unfaithful to the Marquis in his favour. He fairly blazes with heroism."

"Then, since that is your opinion of my family," said the Baron to the Marquis, "I may count on you to call out the Duke de Vallombreuse in my name, and to take my challenge to him?"

"Assuredly," returned the Marquis, in a grave, studied tone that contrasted with his usual lightness; "and further, I place my sword at your service as your second. I shall call at Vallombreuse House in the morning. The Duke is insolent, it is true, but he is no coward, and he will not shelter himself behind his rank as soon as he learns who you really are. But enough on that subject; we shall be wearying Zerbina with our men's quarrels. I can see her ruby lips contracting, in spite of her manners, and laughter, not yawns, must disclose the pearls of which her mouth is the casket. Come, Zerbina, brighten up once more, and help the Baron to wine."

Gracefully and dexterously the maid carried out the request. The conversation turned upon Zerbina's acting. The Marquis loaded her with compliments, which Sigognac endorsed without being guilty of flattery or obligatory civility, for she had unquestionably played with incomparable spirit, dash, and talent. They also discussed the lines of M. de Scudéry, one of the cleverest wits of the day, though the Marquis considered they were somewhat soporific, preferring, for his part, "The Rodomontades of Captain Fracasse," to "Lygdamon and Lydias." The Marquis was a man of taste.

Sigognac seized an early opportunity of taking leave, and withdrew to his room, the door of which he bolted. Then from a serge case, intended to protect it from rust, he took an old sword, his father's, which he had brought away with him as a faithful friend. He drew it slowly from the sheath, and respectfully kissed the hilt. It was a handsome weapon; richly though not excessively ornamented; a weapon meant for use and not for mere show. The blade, of bluish steel inlaid with narrow gold lines, bore the mark of one of the most famous sword-makers of Toledo. Sigognac took a woollen rag and rubbed the steel

until it shone with all its pristine brilliancy. He tested the edge and the point with his finger; then, placing the point against the door, he tried the suppleness of the blade by bending it until it formed almost a complete circle. The trusty steel stood these tests nobly, and it was plain that it would not fail its owner upon the duelling-ground. Excited by the gleam of the blade, and feeling the hilt lie comfortably in his hand, Sigognac practised fencing against the wall, and soon perceived that he had not forgotten the lessons which Peter, who had been a fencing-master, had been in the habit of giving him during their long enforced leisure in Poverty Hall.

The practice he had indulged in with his old servitor, unable as he was to attend an academy, as was the wont of young noblemen, had developed his strength, hardened his muscles, and increased his natural suppleness. Having nothing else to do, he had become passionately fond of fencing, and had very thoroughly studied that noble art; so that, though he still fancied himself a beginner, he had really long since become a master, and in the assaults at arms in which they took part, he frequently pinked Peter on the buff jerkin he wore by way of protection. It is true that he was so

modest as to believe Peter allowed himself to be hit in order not to discourage him by parries that could never be broken down; but therein he was mistaken. The old fencing-master had not kept back any of the secrets of his art from his beloved pupil. For many a year he had kept him practising the principles of sword-play, in spite of the distaste Sigognac occasionally manifested for the constant repetition of such exercises, so that the young man had become as skilful as his teacher, while, thanks to his youth, he was quicker and more supple. His sight was better also, and the result was that Peter, though prepared with a parry for every thrust, could not as surely as formerly divert the Baron's blade. These successes of his pupil, which would have angered an ordinary fencing-master, filled the heart of the old servitor with a pride and delight which he carefully concealed from the Baron, lest the latter should grow careless, and believe he had attained perfection and carried off the palm.

Thus it happened that in an age of experts, of ear-slitters, of swashbucklers, of professional duellists and bravoes, who frequented the schools of Spanish and Neapolitan fencing-masters for the purpose of learning secret thrusts and treacherous strokes, the young

Baron, who had never left his tower save to follow after a wretched hare in the tracks of Miraut, had become, though wholly unconscious of the fact, one of the best blades of the day and capable of holding his own with the most famous swordsmen. He lacked, it was true, the insolent elegance, the assured attitude, the provocative air of some of the nobles renowned for their prowess on the duelling-ground, but it would have taken a very skilful blade to make its way into the narrow circle of his guard.

Satisfied with himself and his sword, which he laid by his bedhead, Sigognac soon fell asleep as soundly as though he had not requested the Marquis de Bruyères to challenge the powerful Duke de Vallombreuse in his name.

Isabella, however, could not close her eyes. She had quickly come to the conclusion that Sigognac would not let the matter drop, but, while she feared the consequences of the quarrel for her friend, it never occurred to her to interfere between the adversaries. In those days affairs of honour were looked upon as sacred, and women would not have ventured to interfere with them or to intervene with tears.

By nine o'clock, the Marquis, fully dressed, called on Sigognac in the latter's room for the purpose of settling the terms of the combat. Sigognac insisted that he should take with him, in the event of unbelief or refusal on the part of the Duke, the old charters, the ancient parchments, from which hung great seals of wax on silken cords, the letters patent, with worn folds and royal signatures in faded ink, the genealogical tree with its numerous branches covered with escutcheons, all the papers, in a word, that testified to the nobility of the Sigognacs. These illustrious deeds, the undecipherable Gothic caligraphy of which would have taxed the eyesight and the skill of a Benedictine monk, were piously wrapped up in a piece of crimson taffeta yellowed by age, and which might have been a remnant of the banner that of yore fluttered in the van of the hundred lances led by Baron Palamedes de Sigognac against the Saracen host.

"It does not appear to me," said the Marquis, "that there is any need, on this occasion, of your establishing your nobility as if you were approaching the College of Heralds. My word, which no one has ever questioned, will be sufficient. However, as the Duke de Vallombreuse may, through excess of contempt and

mad pride, pretend that he can know you only as Captain Fracasse, a player in the pay of Master Herod, I shall take these deeds, which my man shall bring along in case I find it necessary to make use of them."

"Act as you think best," answered Sigognac; "I trust entirely to your good sense, and leave my honour in your hands."

"Rest assured that I shall know how to guard it," answered the Marquis, "and that we shall bring to book that insolent Duke, whose outrageous manners are most offensive to me. A Baron's coronet and the leaves and pearls of a Marquis equal the strawberry leaves of a Duke, when the family is old and its blood free from mixture. But we have talked enough; now let us act. Words are feminine, deeds alone are masculine, and honour can be washed in blood only, as the Spaniards say."

Whereupon the Marquis summoned his valet, handed him the packet of papers, and left the inn for Vallombreuse House in order to carry out his mission.

The Duke, agitated and angered by the events of the previous night, was not yet awake, as it had been late ere he had fallen asleep. Consequently his valet, when ordered by the Marquis de Bruyères to inform

his Grace that he was waiting upon him, opened his eyes like saucers, fairly staggered by the request. It would have been no more dangerous to enter the cage of an African lion or of an Indian tiger than to awaken the Duke and to enter the room before he had rung his bell; for even when his lordship had gone to bed in a good temper, he was apt to be savage in the morning.

"Your lordship had better wait," said the man, trembling at the audacity of the order he had received, "or else call again later. His Grace has not yet rung, and I dare not take on myself — "

"Announce the Marquis de Bruyères," called out Zerbina's friend in a voice that began to sound angry, "or I shall burst in the door and introduce myself. I must see your master on the instant on important business in which honour is involved."

"It is a duel, then?" said the valet, immediately becoming obsequious. "Why did your lordship not mention the fact at once? I shall take your lordship's name to his Grace, who went to bed last night in such a man-eating temper that he will be delighted to awake to a quarrel and to have a pretext for fighting."

And with a resolute mien the lackey entered the Duke's apartments, after having begged the Marquis to be kind enough to wait for a moment.

At the sound of the door opening and closing, Vallombreuse, who was only half asleep, opened his eyes wide, and springing up so suddenly that the bedstead creaked, sat up and looked round for something to throw at the man's head.

"The devil take the dolt that breaks in upon my sleep!" he shouted in an angry voice. "Did I not order you never to presume to enter before I had rung for you? You shall receive a hundred lashes on your bare back for your disobedience. I shall never get asleep again now. For one instant I feared you might be the too loving Corisande."

"Your Grace may have me beaten to death, if it please your Grace, but I did not venture to disobey orders without good reason. The Marquis de Bruyères is below, and desires to speak to your Grace; about an affair of honour, his lordship gave me to understand. And your Grace never denies himself to such callers and always receives visitors on errands of that nature."

"The Marquis de Bruyères?" queried the young Duke. "Did I quarrel with him? I cannot remem-

ber doing so, and besides, it is long since we have met. Perhaps he fancies that I mean to take away Zerbina from him; men in love are always imagining that others are jealous of them. Well, Picard, give me my dressing-gown and draw the bed-curtains, to conceal the disorder of my couch. I must not keep the worthy Marquis waiting."

Picard handed to the Duke a magnificent gown, cut in the Venetian fashion, which he fetched from a wardrobe. It was of golden stuff with a pattern of great black flowers worked in velvet. Vallombreuse drew the girdle tightly around his waist, in order to show off its slimness, sat down in an arm-chair, assumed a careless air, and said to the lackey : —

"Now show in his lordship."

"The Marquis de Bruyères," called out Picard, throwing the door wide-open.

"Good-morning, Marquis," said the young Duke de Vallombreuse, half-rising from his arm-chair, "and welcome, whatever the reason that brings you. Picard, a chair for his lordship. You must pardon my receiving you in an untidy room and in morning undress; it is not through lack of civility, but through desire not to keep you waiting."

"And I beg you will excuse," returned the Marquis, "my insisting so savagely upon disturbing your sleep, filled, as it no doubt was, with delightful dreams; but I have undertaken to bear to you a message of a nature that, between men of our class, brooks no delay."

"You excite my curiosity in the highest degree," answered Vallombreuse, "but I am at a loss to guess your urgent business."

"Probably you have forgotten certain incidents that occurred last night, my lord Duke; such trifling matters not being important enough to impress themselves upon you. I shall therefore, with your leave, refresh your memory. In the actresses' dressing-room you condescended to pay particular attention to a young lady who takes the parts of *ingénues;* Isabella is her name, if I mistake not. And in a playful mood, which for my part I have not the heart to blame, you endeavoured to affix a patch upon her bosom. This attempt, which I refrain from commenting upon, deeply shocked one of the players, Captain Fracasse, who was bold enough to seize your arm."

"You are a most faithful and conscientious historian," put in Vallombreuse. "You have accurately related what took place, and I shall finish the account of the

affair by adding that I promised the fellow, who was as insolent as a lord, a sound cudgelling, that being the form of punishment most appropriate to such a lout as he."

"There is no great harm in having actors or scribblers with whom one is displeased thrashed soundly," said the Marquis, with an air of utter indifference. "These people are scarcely worthy of the sticks that one breaks on their backs, but in this case it is quite another matter. Captain Fracasse, who, besides, thrashed your bullies in glorious fashion, happens to be Baron de Sigognac, a nobleman of very old family and of the best blood in Gascony. There is not a word to be said to his detriment."

"What the devil is he doing among these strollers?" answered the young Duke de Vallombreuse, as he toyed with the cords of his girdle. "And how could I imagine that it was a Sigognac who was got up in that ridiculous costume and that red nose?"

"Your first question," said the Marquis, "I can reply to in a few words. Between you and me, I fancy the Baron is desperately in love with Isabella, and as he could not induce her to stay in his castle, he joined the company in order to pursue his amours. You will certainly not disapprove such conduct,

since it is his lady-love herself who has struck your fancy."

"No; I grant all that. But you must allow that I could not possibly divine the romance, and that Captain Fracasse's act was impertinent."

"Impertinent if done by an actor," returned the Marquis, "but quite natural on the part of a gentleman, jealous of his mistress. That is why Captain Fracasse has thrown aside his mask and comes forward as Baron de Sigognac to challenge you through me and to call you to account for the insult offered him."

"Very good," said Vallombreuse, "but what guarantee have I that this supposed Sigognac, who plays the part of a stage swashbuckler in a company of mummers, is not an intriguing fellow of low condition who has usurped an honoured name in order to have the honour of crossing his stage lath with my rapier?"

"Duke," replied the Marquis de Bruyères in a dignified tone, "I should not act as second and supporter to any one not well born. I am personally acquainted with Baron de Sigognac, who resides but a short distance from my place. I go bail for him. And besides, should you still entertain any doubts concerning his rank, I have with me documents that will entirely re-

move your scruples. Permit me to summon my valet who is waiting in the anteroom, and who will hand you the parchments."

"That is quite unnecessary," returned the Duke. "Your word is sufficient, and I accept the challenge. My friend, the Chevalier de Vidalinc, will be my second. Pray make all necessary arrangements with him; any weapons and any terms will be equally satisfactory to me. Indeed, I shall not be sorry to ascertain whether Baron de Sigognac is as skilful at parrying sword-thrusts as he is at warding off the blows of cudgels. The lovely Isabella shall crown with bays the victor in the tourney, as in the palmy days of chivalry. And now allow me to withdraw. Vidalinc, who lives in the house, will be down in a moment, and you can settle place, time, and weapons with him. Meantime *beso a vuestra merced la maño, caballero.*"

As he spoke these words, the Duke de Vallombreuse bowed with studied courtesy to the Marquis de Bruyères, raised a heavy portière of tapestry, and disappeared.

A few minutes later the Chevalier de Vidalinc joined the Marquis, and the pair speedily settled the conditions of the duel. The natural weapon of gentlemen,

the sword, was selected, and the time fixed for the morrow, as Sigognac desired to avoid a postponement of the performance advertised throughout the whole town, which would be inevitable if he chanced to be slain or wounded. The meeting-place was to be outside the walls, in a meadow that was a favourite rendezvous of the Poictiers duellists, on account of its remoteness, the firmness of the ground, and its natural conveniences.

The Marquis de Bruyères returned to "The French Arms" and reported the result of his mission to Sigognac, who thanked him warmly for having managed matters so well, for he still raged inwardly at the thought of the insolent and libertine glances the young Duke had cast upon Isabella.

The performance was to begin at three o'clock, and since the morning the town-crier had been perambulating the streets and advertising the show with beat of drum, as soon as a circle of curiously minded people had formed around him. The rascal had the lungs of a Stentor, and being accustomed to proclaim edicts, he brought out the titles of the plays and the names of the actors in the most pompous and sonorous voice, making the very panes tremble in the sashes and the

glasses clatter in unison on the tables inside the houses. He had, besides, a mechanical fashion of moving his chin as he delivered his announcements, that made him look like a Nuremberg nut-cracker, and delighted all the little street rascals. Not the ears only of the public, but their eyes also were appealed to, and those of the inhabitants who had not heard the crier could read, in the most frequented crossways, on the walls of the tennis-court, and on the doors of "The French Arms," huge posters on which figured the titles "Lygdamon and Lydias," and "The Rodomontades of Captain Fracasse," in capital letters cleverly alternated in red and black ink, and due to the brush of Scappino, sign-writer to the company. These posters were done in lapidary style, after the manner of the Romans, and purists could have no fault to find with them.

One of the inn servants, who had been dressed up as theatre porter, in a parti-coloured green and yellow smock-frock, with a wide baldric supporting a big rusty sword, and a broad-brimmed beaver pulled down to the eyes and surmounted by a feather tall enough to sweep the cobwebs from the ceiling, kept back the crowd at the door, which he defended with a partisan, allowing no one to enter unless he had first paid for

his seat, or at least exhibited a proper admission ticket. In vain did numbers of lawyers' clerks, of students, pages, and lackeys endeavour to enter surreptitiously, and to crawl under the redoubtable weapon; the vigilant Cerberus tumbled them into the street, where some rolled into the gutter head over heels, to the great delight of the others, who roared with laughter as the victims, covered with mud and filth, tried to rise.

The ladies arrived in sedan chairs carried by athletic fellows who trotted along with their light burdens. Some gentlemen who had ridden up on horses or mules threw the bridles to lackeys placed there for the purpose. Two or three coaches, the paintings on the panels faded and the gilding grown rusty, that had been drawn from the coach-houses for this solemn occasion, drew near the door slowly, drawn by big horses, and from them emerged, as from a Noah's ark, all manner of country hobbledehoys of most peculiar aspect, and rigged out in garments that had been in fashion in the lifetime of the late king. Nevertheless these coaches, ramshackle though they were, impressed the crowd that had collected to watch the people entering the theatre, and when they were drawn up on the

square, side by side, they produced quite a respectable effect.

The hall was soon filled so completely that a needle could not have been got in. On either side the stage, arm-chairs had been placed for persons of rank, an arrangement that unquestionably interfered with the illusion intended to be produced on the stage and with the performance of the actors, but as people were accustomed to it, its absurdity struck no one. The young Duke de Vallombreuse was seated there with his friend the Chevalier de Vidalinc; the former in black velvet, heavily trimmed with jet and a mass of lace, the latter in lovely dark-purple satin, trimmed with gold. The Marquis de Bruyères, who wished to applaud Zerbina without attracting too much attention, had secured a seat in the orchestra behind the musicians.

A number of boxes had been built along the sides of the hall; they were made of deal boards covered with serge and old Flemish tapestries. The centre of the room was turned into the pit, and accommodated the poorer townsmen, the shopmen, lawyers' clerks, apprentices, students, lackeys, and the rest of the rabble.

Ladies, dressed as splendidly as country wardrobes, somewhat behind the court fashions, permitted, settled down in the boxes, spreading out their skirts, and with a deft touch round the upper part of their bodices displayed the charms of their white bosoms. The worthy Poictiers public, however, was not connoisseur enough to know the difference between show and elegance, and was quite pleasantly dazzled. Besides, there were brought out on this occasion fine old family diamonds that, though mounted in antique and dulled settings, were nevertheless of great value; very old lace, somewhat yellow with age, it is true, but well-nigh priceless; long chains of twenty-four carat gold, old-fashioned too, but none the less very heavy; precious brocades and silk stuffs handed down from generation to generation, and such as neither Lyons nor Venice can now turn out. And there were even pretty, rosy, blooming, healthy faces which would have made quite a sensation at Saint-Germain and Paris, though their expression was rather too candid and ingenuous.

Some of the ladies, desiring apparently to remain unknown, kept on their small half-masks, but this did not prevent the gossips in the pit from making out who they were and telling more or less scandalous

stories about them. Yet there was one lady, alone in her box and attended only by a woman who seemed to be her maid, who, masked more closely than her neighbours, kept somewhat in the background, and whom the most inquisitive were unable to make out. Her head was covered with a black lace veil fastened under the chin, so that not even the colour of her hair could be seen. Her dress, of rich dark stuff, seemed to melt into the shadow of the box, in which she carefully kept, unlike the other ladies, who sought to profit by the light of the tapers to be well seen. Frequently she raised to her face, as though to protect her eyes from the glare, a black feather fan, with a mirror in the centre, into which, however, she did not look.

The orchestra, now striking up, recalled every one's attention to the stage, and people forgot the mysterious beauty, who might have been taken for Calderon's *dama tapada*.

The performance began with "Lygdamon and Lydias." The scene, which represented a country landscape, green with trees and carpeted with moss, watered by fresh springs and bounded in the distance by a range of blue hills, took the public's fancy and inclined it to look forward with favour to the play

itself. Leander, who had the part of Lygdamon, was dressed in a purplish pastoral costume, embroidered with green. His carefully dressed hair fell in ringlets on his neck and was fastened quite coquettishly with a knot of ribbon. The slightly starched ruff set off his neck, white as a woman's. His close-shaven chin and face had the faintest bluish shade like the bloom on a peach, a comparison rendered more exact by the ruddy brightness of the delicately rouged cheeks. His teeth, rendered more brilliant by the rouge on the lips, and brushed most thoroughly, sparkled like pearls freshly drawn out of sawdust. His eyebrows had been carefully lined with Indian ink, and another extremely delicate line, running round his eyelids, made his eyes shine with extraordinary brilliancy.

At his appearance a murmur of approval ran round the hall; the ladies bent towards each other, exchanging whispered remarks, and one young lady, but recently returned from her convent school, could not help remarking, with an artlessness that drew down upon her a maternal reproof, "Is n't he lovely?"

This candid maiden had merely expressed the secret opinion of the more discreet of her sex, and not impossibly her mother's opinion also. She blushed deeply

at the reproof, and kept her eyes cast down, though when she thought she was not noticed she allowed them to rest upon Leander.

The most deeply moved of all, undoubtedly, was the masked lady. The quick heaving of her bosom, making the lace upon it rise and fall, the slight trembling of the hand that held the fan, and the fact that she was leaning forward on the edge of the box, so as not to lose any portion of the performance, would have sufficiently indicated the interest she took in Leander, had any one thought of noticing her. Fortunately, every one's attention was turned to the stage, and she had time to recollect herself.

Lygdamon, as everybody knows, for everybody is acquainted with the works of the illustrious George de Scudéry, opens the play with a very touching and pathetic monologue, in which Sylvia's rejected lover discusses the important question of the manner in which he is to put an end to his life, since Sylvia's cruelty makes it impossible for him to remain on this earth. Is he to hang himself or to run himself through with his sword? Or shall he throw himself down from some high rock? Shall he plunge into the river and drown his flame in the flood? He hesitates to

commit suicide, yet knows not what to do. Hope, that springs eternal in the lover's breast, makes him cling to life. Perchance the cruel fair may be softened; perchance his tenacious adoration may incline her to yield. It must be confessed that Leander spoke his lines like a consummate actor, alternately languorous and despairing, and most pathetic indeed. He made his voice tremble as though choked by emotion, and scarcely able to keep back his sobs when he spoke. His sighs seemed to come from the very depths of his heart; he bewailed the cruelty of his love in such gentle, tender, submissive, and moving accents that every woman in the place grew angry with the wicked, hard-hearted Sylvia, and felt quite sure that, had she been in her place, she would not have been so ferociously barbarous as to drive to despair, and perhaps to death, so charming a shepherd.

As he ended his monologue, and while a storm of applause broke out in the hall, Leander cast a glance round upon the ladies in the theatre, letting it linger upon those who he fancied might be of higher rank, for, spite of his numerous disappointments, he had not yet given up hopes of attracting the love of some great lady by his beauty and his talent as an actor. He

noted more than one pair of eyes bedimmed with tears, more than one white bosom heaving with emotion. This merely satisfied his vanity, without causing him the least surprise. Success never does surprise an actor. His curiosity, however, was sharply excited by the masked lady who kept well back in her box. He felt that there was something behind that mystery, and straightway guessed that the mask concealed a passion forced by good breeding to conceal itself. He therefore flashed upon the fair unknown a burning glance intended to apprise her that she was understood.

The glance struck home, and the lady returned it with an almost imperceptible nod, as if to thank Leander for his intelligence. They now understood each other, and whenever the action of the play allowed it, looks were exchanged between them. Leander was a past master in this sort of thing, and knew how to direct his voice and to speak a love passage in such a way that every woman in the place believed it was meant for herself alone.

When Serafina, who played the part of Sylvia, entered, the Chevalier de Vidalinc applauded loudly, and the Duke de Vallombreuse, desirous of aiding his friend's amours, condescended to gently clap his white

hands, the fingers of which were covered with glittering gems. Serafina bowed slightly to the Chevalier and the Duke, and prepared to begin with Lygdamon the pretty dialogue, considered by connoisseurs one of the happiest hits in the play.

As required by her part, she took a few steps on the stage with a preoccupied air, to justify Lygdamon's remark: —

"Now have I surprised you in maiden meditation."

She looked most charming in her nonchalant attitude; her head slightly bent, one hand hanging down, and the other on her waist. Her sea-green skirt, glacéd with silver, was looped up with knots of black velvet; in her hair she wore field-flowers, as if she had picked them unheeding and placed them there without a thought of what she was doing. It was a head-dress that suited her uncommonly well, — better, indeed, than brilliants, although such was not her own opinion; and it was only the fact that her jewel-case was poorly furnished that had compelled her to dress in good taste and to avoid turning a shepherdess into a princess. She spoke charmingly the poetic and flowery lines about roses and zephyrs, the beauty of

the forest and the song of birds, with which Sylvia slyly prevents Lygdamon speaking to her of his love, although the lover turns every image his fair makes use of into a symbol of love and a means of returning to the one thought that fills his mind.

In the course of this scene, Leander, while Sylvia was speaking, cleverly directed a number of sighs towards the mysterious box, and continued to do so until the end of the play, which was greeted with much applause.

No more need be said about a work that is now in every one's hands. Leander's success was complete, and every one felt surprised that so talented an actor had not yet been called to Court. Serafina also had her partisans, and she soothed her wounded pride with the conquest of the Chevalier de Vidaline, who, though not as wealthy as the Marquis de Bruyères, was young, very much the fashion, and in a fair way of attaining success.

After "Lygdamon and Lydias" the company performed "The Rodomontades of Captain Fracasse," which produced its customary effect and caused unbounded laughter. Sigognac, well coached by Blazius and helped by his natural intelligence, was most de-

lightfully extravagant as the hectoring warrior. Zerbina seemed steeped in light, so brilliant was she, and the Marquis, absolutely carried away, applauded her madly. Even the masked lady had her attention drawn to him by the noise he made. She shrugged her shoulders slightly and a faint smile played upon her lips. Isabella, for her part, was somewhat disturbed by the presence of the Duke de Vallombreuse, who was seated on the right-hand side of the stage, and had she been a less practised actress, the public must have noted the fact. She dreaded his indulging in some insolent outbreak, or some outrageous mark of opposition; but happily her fears proved groundless: the Duke did not attempt to disconcert her by staring at her or annoying her with libertine glances, and when her performance called for applause, his was reserved and discreet. Only, when the action of the play required that Captain Fracasse should submit to slaps on the face, boxes on the ear, and blows from a stick, a singular expression of disdain showed on the young Duke's features, and his lip curled proudly as though he were saying to himself, "Disgusting!" But he did not allow his real feeling to be perceived, and throughout the performance remained indolent

and haughty. Though of violent temper, the Duke de Vallombreuse was far too well bred to allow himself to violate the courtesy due to an adversary with whom he was to fight on the morrow. Until then hostilities were suspended : it was a sort of truce of God.

The masked lady had retired before the second part of the performance was over, to avoid the crowd and to re-enter, unnoticed, the sedan chair which was awaiting her close by. Her disappearance greatly perplexed Leander, who was examining the audience from the wings and following her motions.

Hastily casting a cloak over his shepherd's dress, he hurried towards the stage-door in order to follow the unknown. The slight thread that united him to her would be snapped if he did not make haste ; the lady, having emerged from the shadows for an instant, would disappear in the darkness for ever, and the intrigue would come to an end after having scarcely been begun. Yet, although he was breathless on reaching the outside, Leander saw nothing but dark houses and sombre lanes in which glimmered lanterns carried by servants escorting their masters, and the reflection of which quivered in the rain puddles. The

sedan chair, borne by robust footmen, had already turned the corner of a street and had vanished from Leander's impassioned gaze.

"Serve me right for a fool," said he to himself with the frankness men occasionally resort to in moments of crisis; "I ought to have left immediately after the first piece, changed my dress, and awaited the fair unknown at the main door, no matter whether she stayed to see 'The Rodomontades of Captain Fracasse' or not. I am a born idiot, an out and out ass, for not having sense enough to run after a woman of high degree, for I am sure she is one, who makes sheep's eyes at me and turns pale and red under her mask as she watches me on the stage. I deserve never to have for mistresses anything better than sluts and slatterns, kitchen wenches and trulls of that sort."

Leander had got so far in his self-reproaches, when a little page, in brown livery without any galloons, and his hat pulled down over his eyes, suddenly turned up in front of him like a ghost, and said to him in a boyish treble that he tried to deepen so as to disguise its sound:—

"Are you Mr. Leander, who played the part of Lygdamon, the shepherd, in Mr. de Scudéry's piece?"

"I am," replied Leander. "What do you want with me, and what can I do for you?"

"Nothing, thank you," answered the page. "All I have to do is to repeat a message, that is, supposing you care to hear it, from a masked lady."

"From a masked lady!" exclaimed Leander. "Out with it, quick! I am burning with impatience."

"This is it, word for word," returned the page. "'If Lygdamon is as bold as he is handsome, let him be near the church at midnight; he will find a coach waiting for him. Let him get into it and allow himself to be taken along.'"

Ere the astounded Leander had time to reply, the page had vanished, leaving him puzzled to know what he should do; for if, on the one hand, his heart beat high at the thought of a love affair, on the other, his shoulders smarted at the recollection of the thrashing he had received in a certain park, at the foot of the statue of Discreet Love. Might this not be another trap laid for his vanity by some brute jealous of his charms? Might he not find at the appointed meeting-place an irate husband with drawn sword, ready to maul him and cut his throat? These thoughts froze Leander's enthusiasm, for, as I have mentioned,

Leander, like Panurge, feared nothing, save hard knocks and death. Nevertheless, if he failed to profit by the opportunity that presented itself now, so favourably and so romantically, he might never have another, and the dream of his life would never be realised, a dream that had cost him so much in the way of pomades, cosmetics, fine linen, and other bravery. Further, the fair unknown would, if he failed to show up, suspect him of being a coward, a thought too dreadful to be borne and which would inspire courage in the whitest-livered man. It was this unbearable conviction that turned the scales. "And yet," reflected he, "suppose this beauty for whom I am going to run the risk of having my bones broken and being cast into a noisome dungeon, should turn out to be an old dowager, heavily powdered and rouged, and with false hair and teeth? There are plenty lecherous old women, regular ghouls of love, that, unlike graveyard vampires, love to feast on fresh meat. But no! I am sure she is young and attractive, for the little I could see of her neck and bosom was white, rounded, alluring, and holding out the most delightful warranty of what I could not see. Go I shall! Into the coach I get! For nothing is nobler and more aristocratic than a coach, after all."

Having thus made up his mind, Leander returned to the inn, toyed with the supper served to the company, and withdrew to his room, where he got himself up to kill in the most perfect manner he could compass, lavishing on himself embroidered linen, iris powder, and musk. He also buckled on a sword and a dagger; not that they would have proved very efficacious in his inexperienced hands, had occasion arisen for their use, but because a lover armed makes jealous intruders more wary. Then he drew his beaver well down over his eyes, wrapped himself up in Spanish fashion in a dark-coloured mantle, and stepped softly out of the inn, fortunate in not having been perceived by the sarcastic Scappino, who was snoring loud in his room at the other end of the gallery.

The streets were quite deserted, for the good people of Poictiers were given to retiring early, so that Leander did not meet a single living soul, save a few thin-flanked cats prowling around in melancholy fashion, and they, at the sound of his steps, vanished like shadows through an ill-closed door or down a hatchway.

Precisely as the lugubrious sound of the last stroke of midnight drove the owls helter-skelter from the old

tower, he stepped on to the church square. The sinister vibrations of the bell in the silence of night filled Leander's timid soul with secret, religious horror. It seemed to him that the bell was tolling his doom, and for one moment he was on the point of retracing his steps, and prudently returning to his bed at the hotel, instead of launching out into nocturnal adventures. But he saw the carriage waiting at the appointed place, and the little page, the masked lady's messenger, standing on the step and holding the door open. It was too late to retreat, for few people are brave enough to show the white feather before witnesses. Both the boy and the coachman had seen Leander, so the latter approached with an air of determination that concealed the perturbation he felt inwardly, and he entered the coach as intrepidly, to all outward appearance, as Galaor himself.

He had scarcely taken his seat when the driver touched up his horses, which started off at a steady trot. The interior of the coach was plunged in complete darkness, for although it was night, leather curtains had been pulled down in front of the windows and prevented anything being seen outside. The page still stood on the step, and it was utterly useless to try

to make him talk or to get any information from him, for he appeared to be very laconic in his speech and by no means inclined to reveal what he knew, that is, if he did know anything. Leander felt the cushions, which were of velvet pinked with tufts of silk; under his feet was a thick rug, and he breathed in a faint scent of amber given out by the lining of the carriage, a sure sign of elegance and refinement. There was no mistaking the fact that he was being driven to the abode of some lady of quality.

He tried to make out the direction the vehicle was taking, but he was not well acquainted with Poictiers. Nevertheless, he thought he noticed, after a time, that the noise of the wheels no longer echoed against walls, and that they were not crossing gutters constantly. Plainly the coach had issued from the town and he was now being driven into the country, towards some retreat designed for love, — and murder also, thought he, clutching his dagger with a slight shudder, just as though he had been sitting in the dark opposite a blood-thirsty husband or ferocious brother.

At last the carriage stopped; the little page opened the door; Leander got out and found himself in front of a tall sombre wall that he supposed might be the

wall round a park or garden. Presently he managed to make out a door, the cracked, weather-worn, and moss-covered wood-work of which prevented its being at once distinguished from the stones of the enclosure. The page pressed hard upon one of the rusty nails that held the boards together, and the door opened.

"Take my hand, and I shall lead you," said the page. "It is so dark that you could not follow me through the maze of the trees."

Leander obeyed, and the pair walked on for a few minutes through a plantation that, though winter had stripped the trees of their leaves, which crackled under their feet, was still fairly dense. Beyond the wood they entered a flower-garden, the beds in which were bordered with box, and which was adorned with yews clipped into the shape of pyramids, looking, in the darkness, like spectres or sentries, the latter even more terrifying than the former to the timid actor.

After they had traversed the garden, Leander and his guide ascended steps leading to a terrace, on which rose a rustic pavilion, topped with a dome, and ornamented with braziers at the corners. The amorous player noted these details with the help of the faint light that comes from the sky in all open places. The

pavilion might have been thought uninhabited, but for a faint glow that filtered through a thick damask curtain and reddened one of the windows showing against the dark mass of the building.

The masked lady was no doubt awaiting him behind the curtain, and no doubt, also, she too was excited; for in affairs of this kind, women run the risk of losing their characters, and their lives, at times, if it should chance that their husbands hear of the matter and happen to be roughly disposed. But just then Leander was quite free from fear; his vanity blinded him to the danger he was running. The coach, the page, the garden, the pavilion, all these things spoke eloquently of a lady of rank, and the affair had started out in anything but a commonplace manner. He was in the seventh heaven of happiness and seemed to be treading on air. He would have given much to have had the mocking Scappino see him in this glorious moment of triumph.

The page opened a tall glazed door and withdrew, leaving Leander alone in the pavilion, which was furnished with great taste and magnificence. The cupola was painted in imitation of a light turquoise-blue sky, in which floated little rosy cloudlets and Cupids flut-

tered in divers graceful attitudes. The walls were hung with rich tapestries illustrating Honoré d'Urfé's novel, "Astrea." Cabinets inlaid with Florentine gem-stones, arm-chairs upholstered in red velvet and fringes, a table covered with a Turkish carpet, Chinese porcelain vases filled with flowers, notwithstanding the time of year, plainly showed that the lady of the house was wealthy and of high lineage.

Dazzled by the splendour of it all, Leander did not at first notice that the room was empty; he threw off his mantle, which he laid upon a stool together with his hat, touched up in front of a Venice mirror one of his curls the set of which was disarranged, assumed the most gracious attitude he knew of, and said, as he glanced around:—

"Why! where is the goddess of the temple? I see the shrine, but where is the idol? When will she emerge from her cloud, and reveal herself to me, a goddess known by her walk, as Vergil hath it?"

Thus far had Leander proceeded with his amorous inward soliloquy, when a portière of flame-coloured Indian damask was drawn aside, and Lygdamon's masked admirer came in. She still wore her black velvet mask, a fact that worried the actor.

"Can it be that she is ugly? Her fondness for the mask is suspicious," said he to himself.

His fear was soon dispelled; the lady, advancing to the centre of the room where Leander was standing in an attitude of respect, undid the cords of the mask and threw it on the table, revealing, in the light of the tapers, fairly agreeable and regular features, a pair of beautiful, shining brown eyes, blazing with desire, a well-shaped mouth, red as a cherry, with pretty teeth, and a dimple in the chin. Round her face curled rich masses of brown hair that fell upon her shoulders, white and plump, and even ventured to kiss the contours of the breasts that rose and fell tumultuously under the lifting lace that concealed them.

"The Marchioness de Bruyères!" exclaimed Leander in the greatest surprise and with some uneasiness, as he remembered the thrashing he had received. "Is it possible? Am I not dreaming? Dare I believe in such unlooked-for happiness?"

"You are not mistaken, Leander," said the Marchioness, "I am indeed Mme. de Bruyères, and I hope your heart is as quick to know me as your eyes have been to recognise me."

"Your features are engraved on my heart in lines of

fire," answered Leander, passionately. "I have but to look there to behold it adorned with all graces and perfections."

"I thank you for having remembered me so pleasantly," returned the Marchioness. "That proves you have a noble and lofty soul. You must have fancied me cruel, ungrateful, treacherous. Alas! my poor heart is but too tender, and I was far from insensible to the love you showed for me. Your letter, given to a faithless maid, was handed to the Marquis, and he replied to it in the way you know, which naturally misled you with regard to my feelings. Later on, the Marquis, chuckling over what he termed a good joke, made me read that letter, filled with the liveliest and purest love, so that I too might laugh at it. But the result it produced was quite different from that he intended. The feeling I had already for you was increased by it, and I resolved to recompense you for the sorrows you had endured on my account. Knowing that my husband was taken up with his new conquest, I came to Poictiers. Concealed under this mask, I heard you express fictitious love so well that I determined to ascertain whether you could be as eloquent when speaking for yourself."

"Madam," said Leander, kneeling on a cushion at the feet of the Marchioness, who had sunk into an arm-chair, as if overcome by the avowal she had just given utterance to,—"Madam, nay, queen, goddess, rather, what are affected words, counterfeit love, protestations coldly wrought out by poets who bite their nails for very hunger, what are the empty sighs breathed forth at the feet of an actress rouged to the nines and whose inattentive eyes are wandering over the house, what are these by the side of the words that spring from the heart, of a passion that burns to the marrow, of the hyperboles of a love which cannot find in the whole world comparisons brilliant enough for its idol, by the side of the leapings of a heart that would spring from the breast in which it is contained so that it might place itself under the feet of the adored one? You have condescended to say, O celestial Marchioness, that on the stage I make love with warmth; it is because I never look at an actress, and my heart always goes out beyond the footlights, to a perfect ideal, to a lady noble as you, witty as you, beauteous as you; and it is she, and she alone, whom I love under the names of Sylvia, and Doralise, and Isabella, who are but the faint presentments of her."

Thus speaking, Leander, who was much too good an actor to forget that pantomime should accompany delivery, bent over the hand the Marchioness had let him take, and covered it with kisses. She herself caressed the actor's silken, perfumed hair with her long white fingers, covered with rings, and, half-outstretched in her arm-chair, gazed, without noticing them, upon the little winged Cupids in the turquoise-blue heavens above her head. Suddenly she pushed Leander away and staggered to her feet.

"Nay, be done! be done, Leander!" said she, in a quick, breathless way. "Your kisses burn me and make me forget myself."

Supporting herself against the wall, she made for the door by which she had entered, and raised the portière, which fell back behind her and Leander, who had drawn near to assist her.

The winter's dawn was blowing into its red hands to warm them when Leander, carefully wrapped up in his cloak and half-asleep in the corner of the coach, was being driven back to the gates of Poictiers. Happening to raise a corner of the blind in order to see where he was, he caught sight, at a distance, of the Marquis de Bruyères walking alongside of Sigognac and

going to the spot agreed upon for the duel. Leander let fall the leather curtain to avoid being himself seen by the Marquis, whom the coach wheels almost shaved as he drove by. A smile of satisfied vengeance played upon the actor's lips. He had paid the Marquis back for the thrashing!

The spot chosen for the meeting was protected from the wind by a long wall, which had the further advantage of concealing the combatants from the passers-by on the road. The ground was firm, well beaten down, free from stones, humps of earth, and tufts of grass that might trip a man up, and presented, in a word, every convenience to gentlemen desirous of slaying each other in correct fashion.

The Duke de Vallombreuse and the Chevalier de Vidaline, followed by a barber-surgeon, were not long in coming. The four gentlemen bowed to each other with cold politeness and haughty courtesy, as befitted well-bred men about to fight to the death. The features of the young Duke, who was not only undoubtedly brave, but quite convinced of his own superior skill, expressed absolute indifference. Sigognac, although this was his first duel, looked just as self-possessed. The Marquis de Bruyères was

glad to note the fact, which he took for a good omen.

Vallombreuse threw down his cloak and hat, and took off his doublet, Sigognac imitating him carefully. The Marquis and the Chevalier measured the swords, and ascertained that they were of equal length.

The two principals took their places, received their swords, and fell on guard.

"Fall to, gentlemen, and fight bravely," said the Marquis.

"That recommendation is unnecessary," said the Chevalier de Vidalinc. "They will fight like lions, and the duel will be splendid."

Vallombreuse, who, at bottom, could not help despising Sigognac more or less, and fancied he would meet but a weak foe in him, was startled, on carelessly feeling the Baron's steel, to find a supple and firm blade that diverted his own with wonderful ease. He grew attentive, and tried a few feints that Sigognac at once foiled. The latter's blade flashed into the very smallest opening Vallombreuse gave, compelling him to parry promptly. He ventured on an attack, but his sword, thrown aside by a skilful return, left him uncovered, and but for his bending back quickly, he

would have been run right through the breast. The face of the combat was changing, so far as the Duke himself was concerned. He had imagined he would direct it as he pleased, and had meant, after a few passes, to wound Sigognac with a thrust that had never before failed to carry out his purpose. Now, however, he found out that not only was he unable to attack as he wished, but that he needed to call up all his skill to defend himself. In spite of the efforts he made to keep cool, he was being mastered by his anger; he felt himself becoming feverish and unsteady, while Sigognac, quite impassible, seemed to take pleasure in irritating him by his faultless defence.

"It is a pity to be standing idle while our friends are fighting," said the Chevalier to the Marquis. "It is a cool morning; suppose we take a turn at it ourselves by way of restoring the circulation?"

"With great pleasure," returned the Marquis. "It will take the stiffness from our limbs."

Vidalinc, being a better swordsman than the Marquis de Bruyères, disarmed the latter, after a few lunges, with a sharp and quick turn of the wrist. As there was no bad blood between them, they stopped by com-

mon consent and turned their attention anew to the duel between Sigognac and Vallombreuse.

The Duke, hard pressed by the close play of his adversary, had already retreated several times; he was getting tired and breathed hard. Every now and then the swiftly clashing blades flashed forth sparks, but the return to the attack became weaker and weaker. Sigognac, having tired out his adversary, was now lunging and thrusting and compelling him to fall back.

The Chevalier de Vidalinc turned pale and began to fear for his friend. It was evident to any one who knew anything of fencing that the advantage lay wholly with Sigognac.

"Why the devil," muttered Vidalinc, "does not Vallombreuse try on the thrust taught him by Girolamo of Naples, and which that Gascon cannot possibly know?"

As if he had read in his friend's mind, the young Duke resorted to the famous thrust, but at the very moment when he was about to straighten out with a cut-over Sigognac got in before him and lunged so straight and true that his blade pierced clean through the Duke's fore-arm. The pain of the wound forced

the young Duke to relax his fingers, and his sword fell to the ground.

With perfect courtesy Sigognac stopped at once. although he was entitled to follow up his thrust under the terms of the engagement, for the duel was not to stop with the drawing of first blood. He rested the point of his weapon on the ground, put his left hand on his hip, and seemed to await his adversary's pleasure. But Vallombreuse, whose sword had been restored to him by Vidalinc, on an approving nod from Sigognac, proved unable to retain his hold of it and signed that he gave in.

Whereupon Sigognac and the Marquis de Bruyères bowed most politely to the Duke de Vallombreuse and to the Chevalier de Vidalinc, and started back for town.

X

A HEAD AT A WINDOW

THE Duke de Vallombreuse was carefully seated in a sedan-chair, his arm having been dressed by the surgeon and then put in a sling. The wound, though it would prevent his using his sword for some weeks, was not dangerous, the blade having merely traversed the fleshy part of the arm without injuring artery or muscles. It was painful, of course, but his pride was much more sorely hurt; the slight contractions of his features, due to the twinges he felt, were followed by an expression of concentrated wrath, and at such times he tore at the velvet lining of the chair with the fingers of his remaining hand. More than once, during the return to his mansion, he put his head out of the window and rated the porters, who, nevertheless, were walking along as steadily as possible and selected the smoothest ground in order to avoid jolting him. Their precautions did not prevent the wounded man calling them brutes and promising

them they should be soundly thrashed for chucking him up and down as if he were salad in a basket.

When he reached home he refused to go to bed, and lay down propped up with cushions in an invalid-chair, his feet covered with a silken counterpane fetched by Picard, his valet, who was startled to see his master returning wounded, — a most unusual occurrence, seeing that the Duke was such an expert swordsman.

Seated on a stool by his friend's side, the Chevalier de Vidalinc administered to him every fifteen minutes a spoonful of the cordial ordered by the surgeon. Vallombreuse remained silent, but it was plain that he was inwardly boiling with anger, in spite of his affected calmness. At last his wrath vented itself in violent language: —

"Can you understand, Vidalinc, how that lanky plucked stork, flown from its ruinous tower to avoid starving to death, managed to run me through with its long bill? I, who have fought the keenest swordsmen of the day and have always come away without a scratch, leaving behind me some fine fellow swooning and turning up his eyes in the arms of his seconds!"

"The most skilful and the luckiest have their off days," replied Vidalinc sententiously. "Dame Fortune

does not always look at men in the same way ; sometimes she smiles and sometimes she frowns. Until today you have had no reason to complain of her, for she has petted you like a favourite child."

" Is it not shameful," continued Vallombreuse, growing more excited, " that a ridiculous buffoon, a grotesque country bumpkin, who gets thrashed and slapped upon the boards in low farces, should have got the better of the Duke de Vallombreuse, hitherto unbeaten ? I believe he is a professional swashbuckler disguised as an acrobat."

" You are aware of his real rank, vouched for by the Marquis de Bruyères," answered Vidalinc. " Nevertheless I own that his unparalleled skill with the sword amazes me, for I know of no one comparable to him. Neither Girolamo nor Paraguante, the celebrated fencing-masters, have greater closeness of sword play. I watched him very narrowly while you were engaged, and I came to the conclusion that he is more than a match for our most famous duellists. It needed all your skill and the results of the Neapolitan's teaching to prevent your being dangerously wounded. Your defeat is really a victory, for Marcilly and Dupontal, who claim to know something about fencing, and who are reck-

oned among the best swordsmen in Paris, would unquestionably have been laid out by such an adversary."

"I long to have my wound heal," resumed the Duke after a moment's silence, "so that I may challenge him again and take my revenge."

"That would be a dangerous undertaking you had better keep clear of," said the Chevalier. "Your arm might still be a little weak, and your chances of victory would be diminished by so much. Sigognac is a formidable adversary, whom it would not be wise to provoke imprudently. He now knows your style of fighting, and the confidence derived from his first success will make him doubly formidable. Honour is satisfied now; the fight was serious: be content with that."

Vallombreuse could not help acknowledging to himself the truth of these remarks. He had studied fencing sufficiently, and he fancied he excelled in the art, to know that his point, skilful as he was, would never reach Sigognac's breast, defended as it was by an impenetrable guard against which his every effort had proved futile. Though it made him indignant, he nevertheless was compelled to recognise Sigognac's astonishing superiority. He was even constrained to own to himself that the Baron, desiring not to kill him, had

wounded him in a manner that rendered him helpless. This piece of magnanimity, which would have touched a less proud character, irritated his self-love and embittered his resentment. The mere idea of having had the worst of the encounter maddened him, and though he apparently acquiesced in the line of conduct recommended by his friend, it was not difficult to make out, from his sombre and grim air, that a dark purpose of vengeance was already working out in his brain, but that it needed to be nursed by hatred in order to secure its success.

"A pretty figure I shall cut before Isabella," said he with a forced laugh, — but he was laughing on the wrong side of his mouth, — "now that I have had my arm skewered by her gallant. Crippled Cupid does not have much success with the Graces."

"Forget the ungrateful girl," said Vidaline. "After all, she could not foresee that a Duke would take it into his head to fall in love with her. Go back to poor Corisande, who loves you with all her soul and who spends hours weeping at your doors."

"Do not name that woman if you want to remain friends with me," cried the Duke. "Such base love, that no outrage can drive away, disgusts and irritates me. What I want is haughty coldness, rebellious pride,

unattackable virtue. The disdainful Isabella appears to me the more adorable and charming. I am really grateful to her for rejecting my love, that would no doubt be a thing of the past already had she accepted it. Assuredly she cannot have a low and common spirit, when she can repel, in her condition of life, the advances of a nobleman who pays her attentions, and who is not half bad-looking, if the ladies of this city are to be believed. My love for her is mingled with a certain respect that I am not accustomed to feel for women. But how am I to get that damned lordling, that accursed Sigognac, whom the devil fly away with, out of the way ? "

" It will be no easy matter," said Vidalinc, " for he is now on his guard. Then even if we succeeded in getting rid of him, there would still remain Isabella's love for him, and you know better than any one, for you have often suffered from it, the obstinacy of women in such matters."

" If I can only kill the Baron," went on Vallombreuse, unmoved by the Chevalier's arguments, " I shall soon master the girl, in spite of her affectation of prudery and virtue. No one is more speedily forgotten than a dead lover."

Vidaline was of a different opinion, but he did not deem it wise to enter upon a discussion of the subject, as it would merely excite still further Vallombreuse's irritable temper.

"Get well first, and we shall discuss the matter afterwards. All this talk is tiring you; try to take some rest and not to worry. If I do not see to it that you are kept quiet in mind as well as body, the surgeon will blame and scold me for not doing my duty as nurse."

The wounded man saw the force of the remark, kept silence, closed his eyes, and ere long dropped off to sleep.

Sigognac and the Marquis de Bruyères had quietly returned to the inn, where, like discreet gentlemen, they did not breathe a word about the duel. But walls, which are said to have ears, have eyes also, and can see at least as much as they hear. Though the place selected for the duel was apparently a lonely one, the progress of the fight had been followed by more than one inquisitive pair of eyes. In the idleness of provincial life there are plenty of these invisible or unnoticed flies that manage to buzz around places where anything is happening, and fly off afterwards to spread the news of it everywhere. By breakfast time the whole of Poic-

tiers was already aware that the Duke de Vallombreuse had been wounded in a duel with a stranger. Sigognac, living very quietly at the inn, had exhibited to the public his mask only, not his face. This fact piqued curiosity, and every one's imagination was busily engaged in the attempt to discover the victor's name. It would serve no purpose to record the amazing suppositions that were indulged in. Each man and woman laboriously wrought out one for him or herself, and supported it with the most frivolous and ridiculous arguments, but to no one did the preposterous notion occur that the real victor was the Captain Fracasse who had excited such roars of laughter the day before. A duel between a nobleman of the Duke's rank and a strolling player would have been so unprecedented and so amazing an affair that not a soul suspected the real fact. Many of the people of quality in the place caused inquiries to be made after the Duke's health at his residence, reckoning on the customary indiscreetness of the servant tribe to obtain some clue, but the Duke's people proved as reticent as mutes in a seraglio, for the very good reason that they knew nothing whatever.

The wealth, the haughty pride, the beauty, and the success of Vallombreuse, where women were con-

cerned, had excited considerable jealousy and hatred, that dared not, however, manifest themselves openly, but that were gratified by his defeat. This was the first time he had been beaten, and every one whom he had offended by his arrogance rejoiced at his being hurt in his tenderest spot, his self-love. They dilated, though they had not seen the man, upon the courage, the skill, and the proud port of the Duke's adversary. The ladies, who all, more or less, had reason to complain of the Duke's conduct towards them, for he was one of those vile priests who defile the altar on which they have burned incense, were enthusiastic in their praises of the man who had avenged their secret wrongs. They would gladly have crowned him with bays and myrtle, save and except the tender-hearted Corisande, whom the news of the Duke's wound drove nearly distracted, and who went weeping through the streets. Although she incurred the risk of being harshly turned away, she succeeded in forcing her way into the mansion, though she did not manage to see the Duke, who was too well guarded; but the Chevalier de Vidaline, kinder and more sympathetic, took the greatest pains to reassure the unhappy woman, who was far more concerned for the ungrateful nobleman than he deserved.

All the same, as there is nothing hid on this sublunar and terraqueous earth but that it will out, it was learned from Master Bilot, who had it from James, the Marquis's man, who had heard the conversation that had taken place at Zerbina's supper between his master and Sigognac, that the unknown hero, who had wounded the Duke de Vallombreuse, was undoubtedly Captain Fracasse, or rather a Baron who had joined Herod's company of strolling players in order to follow the woman he loved. As for the Baron's name, James had forgotten it; it ended in "gnac," a termination common enough in Gascony, but as to the gentleman's rank he was positive.

This true and romantic story made a great sensation in Poictiers. Every one became deeply interested in so brave and so skilful a nobleman, and when, as Captain Fracasse, he stepped on to the stage, prolonged applause testified, even before he had said a word, to the popularity he had won. A number of the ladies of the very highest rank did not hesitate, even, to wave their handkerchiefs; and Isabella herself was applauded in more sonorous fashion than usual, so that she was almost upset and blushed under the rouge that covered her cheeks. She did not interrupt herself, however,

and acknowledged the favourable reception given her with a modest curtsey and a graceful bow.

Herod rubbed his hands with delight, and his big colourless face shone like the full moon, for the house was crammed and the cash-box like to burst with the plethora of coin, every one being eager to see the famous Captain Fracasse, actor and gentleman, whom neither cudgels nor swords dismayed, and who had not hesitated, as a valorous champion of the fair, to stand up to a duke who inspired terror in the bravest hearts. Blazius, on the other hand, considered that this great success was rather an omen of trouble, for he feared, and not without reason, the Duke's vindictive temper, and felt sure the latter would soon find a way to revenge himself and pay off his old scores against the company. Earthen crocks, he said, ought to avoid contact with iron pots, even though they might have come off unscathed in the first rub, for metal is harder than clay. Whereat Herod, trusting to the support of Sigognac and the Marquis, called him a poltroon, a lily-livered fellow, and a dastard.

Had not the Baron been genuinely in love with Isabella, he might have easily been unfaithful to her more than once, for many a beauty smiled most

tenderly upon him, notwithstanding his burlesque costume, his vermilion nose and his ridiculous part, which did not encourage romantic illusions. Even Leander's success was endangered by him; in vain the latter showed off his leg, swelled out like a bantam pigeon, twisted his curls round his fingers, paraded his solitaire ring and smiled till he showed his gums; he had ceased to attract notice, and he would have been maddened by spite, had not the masked lady been in her box, never taking her eyes off him, and answering his glances with taps of her fan on the edge of the box and other similar signs of intelligence. His recent success in love poured balm upon the slight wound to his self-love, and the pleasures the night promised consoled him for not being the star of the evening.

The players returned to the inn, and Sigognac escorted Isabella to her room, into which, contrary to her habit, the young actress allowed him to enter. The maid lighted the candles, put wood on the fire, and then discreetly withdrew. When the door had closed, Isabella took Sigognac's hand and pressed it with more force than one would have supposed her frail and delicate fingers could exert. Then in a voice filled with deep emotion, she said: —

"Swear you will never again fight a duel on my behalf. Swear it, if you love me as truly as you say you do."

"I cannot take such an oath," replied the Baron, "for if any insolent fellow should fail in respect to you, I shall certainly chastise him, be he duke or prince."

"Remember," urged Isabella, "that I am only a poor actress, exposed to be insulted by any one. The world's opinion, too fully justified, alas! by the morals of our profession, holds that every actress is also a courtesan. Once a woman has stepped on to the boards, she belongs to the public; eager glances take in every one of her charms and scrutinise her beauty, and imagination seizes upon her as if she were every one's mistress. There is no man who, because he knows her, but thinks he is known to her, and if he gains admission behind the scenes, straightway shocks her sense of decency by declarations she is innocent of having provoked. If she remains respectable, her virtuous conduct is reputed to be mere affectation or the outcome of calculation. We have to put up with these things, since we are powerless to change them. You may henceforth trust to my repelling by my reserve, my short speech, my icy looks the impertinence

of lords and cads and fops of all sorts who bend over my dressing-table or knock, between the acts, at the door of my room. A sharp rap with a busk upon fingers that are making too free is every whit as good as a thrust of your rapier."

"You must allow me to believe, charming Isabella," said Sigognac, "that an honourable man's rapier may well back up, at times, an honest woman's rap with a busk, and I beseech you not to deprive me of the post of your knight and champion."

Isabella still held Sigognac's hand in hers, and kept her blue eyes, full of an expression of caress and supplication, fixed upon him in order to induce him to make the promise she desired. But the Baron was wholly deaf to her mute entreaties, and intractable as a hidalgo on the point of honour. He would have braved a thousand deaths rather than suffer any one to fail in respect to the woman he loved, and was resolved that Isabella on the stage should be as highly honoured as a duchess in her own drawing-room.

"Come, promise," said the young actress, "not to run such risks again, and for so poor a reason. I cannot tell you in what anguish and anxiety I was plunged until your return, for I knew you had gone to fight

the Duke, of whom every one speaks in accents of terror. Zerbina had told me the whole story. It was wicked of you to torment me so. You men do not bestow much thought on women when your pride is involved: you go on without hearing our sobs or noting our tears; deaf to everything, blind and ferocious. Do you know that I should have died had you been slain?"

And the tears glittered in Isabella's eyes at the mere thought of the danger run by Sigognac, and the trembling of her voice attested the sincerity of her words.

Moved beyond all expression by Isabella's genuine love, Baron de Sigognac put his arm round her waist, drew her unresistingly to his breast, and touched with his lips the girl's forehead, whose panting bosom he felt close to his.

They remained thus silent for a few moments, in an ecstasy that a less respectful lover than Sigognac would have taken advantage of; but the latter would have scorned to profit by her chaste forgetfulness of herself, due as it was to grief.

"Console yourself, dear Isabella; not only am I not dead, but I have even wounded my adversary, excellent

swordsman though he be," said he tenderly and playfully.

"I know that your heart is stout and your hand steady," returned Isabella, "and I love you, and am not afraid to tell you so, for I know that you will respect my frankness, and not take advantage of it. When I saw how sad and lonely you were in that Poverty Hall of yours where you were wasting your youth, I felt filled with tender, sorrowful pity for you. Happiness does not attract me; its brightness makes me shy. Had you been happy, you would have frightened me away. In your little garden, when we were walking through it you pushed the brambles aside for me, you plucked for me a little wild rose, the only gift it was in your power to make. I dropped a tear upon it before putting it into my bosom, and there and then, unknown to you, I gave you my heart in exchange."

As he listened to these sweet words Sigognac strove to kiss the lovely lips that uttered them, but Isabella freed herself from his clasp without repellent prudery, but with the modest firmness that a well-bred man never opposes.

"Yes, I love you," she went on, "but not as other women love. It is your fame that I cherish, not

myself that I seek to satisfy. I am quite willing to be believed your mistress, since that is the only way of explaining your being with us. Little do I care for what may be said of me provided I retain my own self-respect and know that I remain virtuous. A single stain would kill me. No doubt it is the noble blood that flows in my veins that inspires me with such pride, — very ridiculous, is it not, in an actress? — but I cannot help it."

Timid though Sigognac was, he was young also. The sweet avowal that would not have surprised a fop, filled him with delicious intoxication and moved him most deeply. His usually pale cheeks flushed suddenly; waves of fire passed before his eyes; the blood surged into his buzzing ears and he felt his heart beat so fast as almost to choke him. He undoubtedly believed in Isabella's virtue, but it occurred to him that with a little audacity he might overcome her scruples, and he remembered having heard that an opportunity once missed never returns. The girl stood before him in all the splendour of her beauty, radiant, luminous, as it were, a soul made visible, an angel standing on the threshold of the paradise of love. He stepped toward her, and clasped her in his arms with convulsive ardour.

Isabella did not attempt to struggle, but, bending backwards to avoid the young man's kisses, fixed upon him a look full of grief and reproach. From her lovely blue eyes sprang tears, pearls of chastity, that ran down her suddenly blanched cheeks to Sigognac's lips; a stifled sob shook her frame, and she sank down as if about to swoon.

The terrified Baron laid her in an arm-chair, and kneeling before her, took hold of her hands, implored her forgiveness, blaming himself for his outbreak due to the fire of youth, to a moment of madness which he bitterly repented, and for which he would atone by the most absolute submission.

"You have caused me much pain," sighed Isabella at last. "I had such complete confidence in your sense of honour. The avowal of my love for you ought to have been sufficient, and the very outspokenness of it should have made you understand I would not yield to you. I had supposed you would allow me to love you in my own way without alarming my affection by coarse desires. You have yourself destroyed that feeling of security. I still trust your word, but I no longer dare listen to my love. And yet it was so sweet to see, to hear you, to read your thoughts in your eyes. It was

your sorrows I longed to share, leaving to others to share your joys. Among all those low, dissolute libertines, I was wont to say to myself, 'There is one man who does believe in chastity and knows how to respect the woman he loves.' I, a mere actress, had indulged in the dream of exciting a pure love, even while relentlessly pursued by odious gallantries. All I hoped to do was to lead you to the threshold of happiness, and then to vanish again in the shadows. You can see for yourself that I was not too ambitious."

"Adorable Isabella," cried Sigognac, "every word you utter makes me feel the more deeply my own unworthiness. I misjudged your angelic heart, and I ought to kiss the very ground you tread upon. But fear nothing henceforth as far as I am concerned; the husband shall restrain the lover's fire. I have but my name, unstained and blameless like your own self; I offer it to you, if you will deign to accept it."

Sigognac was still on his knees before the young girl. As he spoke, she bent down towards him, and seizing his head in her hands in a passion of love, printed a swift kiss upon the Baron's lips; then, rising, she took a few steps.

"You shall be my wife," said Sigognac, intoxicated

by the contact of her lips, that were as blooming as a flower, and that burned him like fire.

"Never, never," returned Isabella in great excitement. "I shall show myself worthy of such happiness by refusing it. Oh! dear friend, my soul is in ecstasy! You do respect me, then? You would really take me with uplifted head into the rooms where hang the portraits of your ancestors; into the chapel where stands your mother's tomb? Did you do so, I should not fear to face the eyes of the dead from whom nothing is hid, and the virgin's wreath would be meet ornament for my brow."

"What!" exclaimed the Baron, "you say that you love me, and yet you will have none of me as either lover or husband?"

"You have offered me your name, and that is sufficient for me. I return it to you, after having kept it for one moment in my heart. For one passing instant I shall have been your wife, and I shall never belong to any other man. While I was kissing you, I was consenting all the time in my heart, but I have no right to enjoy so much happiness on earth. It would be a great mistake in you, dear friend, to clog your fortunes by marrying a poor actress like me, who would always

have her stage life cast up in her teeth, respectable and pure though that life has been. The cold looks and averted faces with which women of rank would receive me would hurt you, and the more that you would be unable to challenge the wretches to a duel. You are the last of a noble race, and it is your duty to restore your house, smitten by adverse fate. When with a tender glance I induced you to leave your home, all you thought of was a possible love affair. That was natural enough, but I, anticipating the future, I thought of something very different. I saw you returning from court, richly dressed, and appointed to some high office. Sigognac resumed its former splendour; in my thoughts I tore the ivy from the walls, I restored the fallen stones, I repaired the broken sashes, I regilded the faded storks on your escutcheon, and having led you to the boundaries of your domains, vanished with a sigh."

"Your dream shall come true, noble Isabella, but not quite as you have dreamed it, for the ending would be far too sad. You shall be the first, your hand in mine, to cross the threshold from which the brambles of neglect and ill fortune shall have been cleared away."

"No, no; it shall be a beautiful, high-born, and rich heiress, worthy of you in every respect, whom you will be able to present with pride to your friends, and of whom no one shall be able to say, 'I hissed her, or I applauded her at such and such a place.'"

"It is cruel to drive one to despair by being at once so adorable and so perfect," said Sigognac. "It is wicked to open heaven to a man and straightway to close it in his face. But I shall overcome your resolve."

"You would attempt it in vain," returned Isabella; "it is unchangeable; I should despise myself if I forsook it. You must perforce be satisfied with the purest, the truest, the most devoted love that ever filled a woman's heart, but you must not ask for more. It is a dreadful thing, is it not?" she added with a witching smile, "to be adored by an *ingénue* whom many have the bad taste to consider charming. Why, Vallombreuse himself would be proud to be so loved!"

"To give one's self and to refuse one's self so absolutely! No other woman than you could have thought of such a contrast as the mingling of the sweet and the bitter in the same cup."

"I know that I am a strange girl," answered Isabella.

"I take after my mother in that respect, but you must have me as I am. If you should persist or torment me, I should know how to take refuge in some asylum where you could never find me; so that settles the matter. And now, as it is growing late, retire to your room and alter the lines in this play, which we are to perform soon, and which suit neither my face nor my character. I am your dear friend; be my poet."

While speaking, Isabella took from a drawer a roll tied with a pink ribbon and handed it to Baron de Sigognac.

"Now kiss me and go," she said, holding out her cheek to him. "You are going to labour for me, and the labourer is worthy of his hire."

When he had withdrawn to his room Sigognac remained long a prey to the emotion aroused in him by the scene he had just passed through. He was at once wretched and delighted, radiant and gloomy, in the seventh heaven and in the lowest confines of hell. He alternately laughed and wept, torn by the most tumultuous and contradictory feelings. The joy of being beloved by so beautiful a woman uplifted him, while the certainty that his love was hopeless overwhelmed him with deepest sorrow. But little by little his excitement

passed away, and he cooled down. He recalled every word Isabella had spoken, and commented upon it, and the picture of the restored castle of Sigognac which she had evoked presented itself to his heated imagination in the brightest and liveliest colours. Still awake he had a sort of vision.

The façade of the castle shone white in the sunshine, and the regilded vanes glittered against the azure sky. Peter, wearing a rich livery and standing between Beelzebub and Miraut under the gate with the escutcheon, was awaiting his master. From the long disused chimneys rose the smoke in joyous whirls, indicating that the mansion was filled with a numerous retinue and that abundance reigned in it once more.

He beheld himself — attired in a dress as handsome as it was in good taste, the lace and embroidery on which shimmered and sparkled — leading towards his ancestral home Isabella, who wore the robes of a princess, covered with arms the blazonry of which appeared to designate one of the most illustrious families in France. A ducal coronet flashed upon her brow, but she did not appear to be in the least exalted on that account. She still had her own tender and modest look, and carried in her hand Sigognac's gift,

the little rose, which was yet blooming in spite of the lapse of time, and the scent of which she breathed in as they walked along.

As the young couple drew near the castle, an old gentleman of the most venerable and majestic aspect, whose breast was covered with the stars of several orders, and whose face was utterly unknown to Sigognac, came out a short distance from the porch as if to greet the newly wedded pair. The Baron was most surprised, however, to see standing by the old gentleman's side a youth of proud port, whose features he failed at first to make out, but who ere long appeared to him to be the Duke de Vallombreuse. The young man had lost his haughty expression and was smiling upon him with much friendliness.

The tenants were shouting "Long live Isabella! Long live Sigognac!" and manifesting the liveliest delight. Amid the tumult of the acclamations was heard the blast of a hunting-horn, and soon there emerged from a thicket into the clearing, a huntswoman who was punishing her recalcitrant horse, and whose features were uncommonly like Yolande's. She patted her horse's neck, compelled it to adopt a quieter pace, and passed slowly in front of the manor house.

Sigognac could not help following with his glance the fair rider, whose velvet skirt blew out into the shape of a wing, but the more intently he looked at her, the more did she pale and thin out. The figure became of ghost-like transparency, and through its blurred contours portions of the landscape were visible. Yolande was fading away like a faint remembrance in the real presence of Isabella; true love was dispelling youth's early dreams.

In that ruinous mansion, where the eye beheld naught but desolation and wretchedness, had the Baron led his gloomy, sleepy, dull life, himself becoming more like a shadow than a man, until the day of his first meeting with Yolande on the moors where she was hunting. Until then the only women he had seen were peasants tanned by the sun, and mud-bespattered shepherd girls; females, not women. Consequently he was dazzled by the sight of Yolande de Foix as men are dazzled when they stare at the sun. Even when he closed his eyes there passed before them that radiant form which seemed to belong to another world. Yolande, it must be owned, was incomparably beautiful, and well fitted to fascinate men more used to feminine beauty than a poor country gentleman riding a thin-

flanked nag and wearing his father's old clothes that were too large for him. But the smile which his grotesque accoutrement called forth made Sigognac realise instantly that it would be ridiculous in him to entertain the least hope of winning the love of the haughty beauty. He therefore avoided meeting her, or else contrived to look at her from the safe shelter of a hedge or the trunk of a tree upon the roads she was in the habit of riding along, accompanied by her escort of admirers, whom Sigognac, with characteristic self-abasement, thought every one abominably handsome, marvellously dressed, and superbly amiable. On such days he would return to his rookery his heart filled with sadness and bitterness, wan, discomposed, and cast down, like a man after a great sickness, and remain sunk in silence for hours at a time, seated by the fireside, his chin resting in his hand.

Isabella's visit to the castle had crystallised that vague need of love which troubles youth, and which fastens upon chimeras in idleness. The grace, the gentleness, and the modesty of the young actress had gone straight to Sigognac's heart, and he was actually very deeply in love with her. She had healed the wound inflicted upon him by Yolande's contempt.

Sigognac, having indulged for a time in these visionary fancies, took himself to task for his idleness, and succeeded, not without difficulty, in riveting his attention upon the play Isabella had intrusted to him for the purpose of making some alterations in it. He cut out lines that did not accord with the young actress' appearance, and added others; he re-wrote the hero's declaration of love, which appeared to him to be cold, affected, pretentious, and smacking of euphuism. The one he substituted for it was unquestionably more natural, more passionate, and more fiery, for in fancy he was himself speaking the words to Isabella.

The work kept him busy until late in the night, but he completed it in a way that satisfied him and did him credit, and the next day he was repaid for his trouble by a sweet smile from Isabella, who straightway set to learning the lines altered by her poet, as she called him. Neither Hardy nor Tristan could have done better than had Sigognac.

That night the house was fuller even than on the preceding evening, and the porter at the door was nearly crushed in the jam of spectators who were all trying to get in at the same time, fearing, though they had paid for their seats, that there would be no room

left. The reputation of Captain Fracasse, victor over the Duke de Vallombreuse, was rapidly growing and attaining tremendous proportions. Indeed, his admirers were not far from crediting him with having performed the labours of Hercules and the great deeds of the twelve knights of the Round Table. A number of young gentlemen, hostile to the Duke, proposed to make friends with the valiant swordsman and to invite him to a carouse at a tavern, at six pistoles apiece, while more than one lady was busy composing love letters to him, in the most amorous strain, and had torn up half a dozen unsatisfactory attempts. In a word, he was all the rage, and every one swore by him. He himself was by no means pleased with a success that prevented his remaining unknown, but he could not escape from it; he simply had to put up with it. For one brief instant he did dream of hiding and not showing up on the stage, but when he thought of the despair into which he would thus plunge the Tyrant, who was simply in ecstasies over the enormous receipts he was taking in, he gave up the notion. The worthy players, who had come to his help in his state of misery, had a right to benefit by the unexpected vogue that had come to him. So, resigning himself to

play his part, he buckled on his belt, draped his cloak over his shoulder, and waited to be summoned by the call-boy.

As the money was flowing in and as the houses were large, Herod, like a generous manager, had doubled the number of lights, so that the place was as brilliantly illuminated as a Court theatre. With the object of fascinating Captain Fracasse, the ladies of Poictiers had dressed themselves to kill; *in fiocchi*, as they say in Rome. Not a diamond had been left in the jewel-cases, and the brilliants sparkled and scintillated upon more or less white bosoms, upon more or less pretty heads, animated by the liveliest desire to attract.

A single box, that occupying the best position, and the most easily seen from all parts of the house, remained empty, and people glanced inquiringly in that direction. The apparent indifference of the people who had taken it surprised the nobility and the town's-people, who had been in their places for more than an hour past. Herod, peeping through the half-parted curtain, appeared to be waiting the arrival of the careless persons before giving the signal for the raising of the curtain, the regulation three knocks on the floor.

And indeed nothing is more disagreeable than the late and disturbing arrival of spectators, who move their chairs about, settle down noisily and distract the attention of the house.

Just as the curtain was rising, a young lady entered the box, and a nobleman of venerable and patriarchal appearance sat down beside her. Long silvery locks, the ends of which curled, framed in the old gentleman's face, while the top of his skull resembled ivory. His face had the ruddy colour that betokens a life spent in the open air, and suggests a certain Rabelaisian devotion to the bottle. His eyebrows, which were still black and thick, shaded a pair of eyes the brightness of which had been in no wise diminished by age, and which flashed at times out of their brown ring of wrinkles. Mustaches and a chin tuft, to which the epithet, "claw-like," which the old *chansons de geste* invariably use in reference to Charlemagne's beard, might have been applied, curled around his thick lipped, sensual mouth, while a double chin connected his face and his fat neck. His general appearance, therefore, would have been rather common, had not his expression redeemed it, and left no doubt as to the rank of the personage. A collar of Venice point lace fell over

his gold brocade doublet; his linen, dazzlingly white and covering a fair sized corporation, overflowed at the waist and covered the upper part of his tan coloured velvet trunk. A cloak of the same colour, trimmed with gold braid and put on carelessly, hung in folds on the back of the chair. It was quite evident that the old gentleman was an uncle playing the part of chaperon, and reduced to the condition of a duenna by his niece, whom he adored in spite of her capricious ways. As one looked at the pair of them, they might have been a slender and lissome Diana, leading by a leash an old half-tamed lion, sluggish and sulky, that would rather have gone on sleeping in its den than be carted round the place, and yet nevertheless allowed itself to be dragged round.

The dress of the young lady herself proclaimed by its elegance the rank and wealth of the wearer. A gown of glaucous green, a shade that only fair women quite sure of their complexion dare wear, set off the snowy whiteness of her chastely uncovered bosom, while her neck, of alabaster translucence, sprang, like a pistil from the corolla of a flower, from out a starched open-worked ruff. The skirt, of silver tissue, shimmered in the light, and brilliant points

indicated the pearls that edged her gown and her bodice. Her hair, gleaming with light and made up into a mass of small ringlets on the forehead and temples, looked like living gold, and a score of sonnets, filled with Italian conceits and Spanish compliments, would have been needed to describe it properly. The whole house was already dazzled by her beauty, although she had not yet taken off her mask; what was visible of her face, however, was a warrant for the rest: a pretty, well-cut chin, an admirably shaped mouth, the red of which was improved by the juxtaposition of the black velvet, the long, graceful, refined oval of the face, and the ideal perfection of the little ears that might well have been cut in agate by Benvenuto Cellini, — all this betokened charms goddesses themselves might have envied.

Presently, whether it was that she felt incommoded by the great heat of the hall, or whether she proposed to exhibit towards men a generosity they rarely deserved, the young divinity removed the detestable mask that concealed half her beauty. Then were seen her lovely eyes, the translucid pupils of which flashed like lazulite from out long golden-brown lashes; her nose, half Greek, half aquiline, and her cheeks rich with a

delicate bloom that would have carried it off over that of the freshest rose. It was Yolande de Foix. But the envy of the women who felt their chances of being admired diminished, had already enabled the worthy ladies, who feared to be reduced to play the parts of plain persons or old wall flowers, to recognise her.

Casting a quiet glance over the excited spectators, Yolande leaned upon the edge of the box in an attitude that would have made the fortune of a sculptor, if it were possible for any artist, whether Greek or Roman, to invent a pose so graceful in its carelessness and so natural in its elegance.

"Mind you take good care not to doze off, uncle," said she in a whisper to the old nobleman, who at once drew himself up and opened his eyes very wide. "It would not be very courteous to me, did you do so, and would be entirely contrary to the laws of gallantry in your day, which you are always praising up to me."

"Do not worry, my dear niece; when I feel too much bored by the nonsense and empty talk of these mummers, whose performances have scant attraction for me, I shall look at you and straightway my eyes will be as bright as a basilisk's."

While this dialogue was taking place between

Yolande and her uncle, Captain Fracasse, striding along with outstretched legs, had stalked down to the footlights with the most outrageous and insulting mien that can be imagined. Frantic applause broke out all over the house on the entrance of the favourite actor, and for a time no one paid any attention to Yolande.

Sigognac was certainly not conceited, and his aristocratic pride made him contemn the profession of strolling player which cruel necessity had compelled him to embrace; yet I would not swear that his self-love was not pleasantly tickled by the warm and noisy greeting he received. The popularity of actors, gladiators and pantomimists has at times excited the jealousy of men in high places, of Roman emperors and Cæsars, masters of the world, who deigned to contend, on the arena or on the stage, for the crowns offered to singers, mimes, wrestlers, and drivers, although they possessed already numbers of them, as witness Ahenobarbus Nero, to mention the most famous of them only.

When the clapping had ceased, Captain Fracasse cast over the house that glance which no actor fails to indulge in with a view to ascertaining whether the spectators are numerous, and whether the audience is disposed to merriment or severity, so that he may

modify his own performance in accordance with the indications he notes, and take or avoid liberties.

All of a sudden the Baron felt dazzled; the lights grew to the size of suns, and then seemed to stand out black against a luminous background. The faces of the spectators, whom he could faintly make out below him, were lost in a sort of mist; hot perspiration, that at once turned icy cold, broke out over him from head to foot; his legs gave way, and he felt as though he had sunk into the floor up to the belt. His mouth felt dried up and parched; an iron collar appeared to clasp his neck like a Spanish garrote, and the words he had to speak came forth bewildered, tumultuous, tumbling over and mixing up with each other like birds hurrying out of an open cage. At one fell blow he had lost his coolness, his self-mastery, and his memory. It was just as though he had been smitten by an invisible thunderbolt, and he came within an ace of tumbling over the footlights. The reason was that he had just caught sight of Yolande in her box, in all the splendour and assurance of her beauty, looking at him with her lovely bluish-green eyes.

O shame! O horror! O most unkind cut of fate! O hap most painful to a noble soul! Here was he,

beheld in grotesque costume, engaged in the low and derogatory occupation of diverting the rabble with his grimaces, by a girl so haughty, so arrogant, so disdainful that he would have loved to humble her and to break her pride by the performance of mighty deeds, heroic performances, superhuman feats only! And here he was, unable to vanish, to disappear, to sink into the bowels of the earth!

For one instant he bethought himself of fleeing, of plunging head first through the backdrop, but his feet were loaded with the leaden soles that, it is said, runners are in the habit of wearing in order to acquire greater lightness. He could not move, and remained bewildered, stupid, open-mouthed, to the great astonishment of Scappino who, supposing that Captain Fracasse had forgotten his lines, was prompting him in a whisper.

But the public imagined that the actor was waiting for a second round of applause before beginning, and started to clap, stamp, and make the most tremendous row that ever was heard within a theatre, thus enabling Sigognac to recover himself. He exerted his fullest powers of will, and abruptly regained complete control of himself.

"Let me at least enjoy the reward of my shame," said he to himself, as he steadied his trembling limbs. "A pretty thing it would be to be hissed in her presence and showered with apple-cores and rotten eggs. Then she may not have recognised me under this abominable mask, for who, indeed, would imagine that it is a Sigognac who is rigged out like a performing monkey in this red and yellow striped dress. Come, let me pull myself together, and be a man! I shall play like the very devil, and if I do well, she will applaud me; that, by my faith, will be a triumph worth earning, for she is hard enough to please."

All this passed through Sigognac's mind in less time than it takes to write it, for the pen can never travel as rapidly as thought. Meanwhile he was spouting his great tirade with such strange bursts of voice, such unexpected intonations, and so tremendously comic a fury that the house broke out into a storm of applause, and Yolande herself, although it was plain she cared not for that sort of thing, could not keep back a smile. Her uncle, the stout Commander, was wide-awake, and clapping his gouty hands to show his satisfaction. The unfortunate Sigognac, driven to despair, seemed, by the exaggeration of his performance, the wildness of

his buffoonery, and the absurdity of his rodomontades, to make sport of himself and to be bent on drinking the bitter cup of his fate to the very dregs, casting under foot his dignity, his rank, his self-respect, the remembrance of his ancestors, and trampling upon them with fierce, delirious joy.

"Now, surely, must thou be satisfied, O adverse Fate," said he to himself, as he felt himself slapped, boxed on the ears, and kicked. "Now am I assuredly brought low enough, and sunk deep enough in contempt. Thou hadst made me wretched, and now thou dost make me ridiculous! By thy vile tricks thou dost compel me to dishonour myself in the presence of that lovely girl! What more dost thou desire?"

At times his anger overmastered him, and he rebelled against Leander's blows with so threatening and dangerous a look that the latter fell back terrified, but Sigognac, quickly recalling the spirit of his part, would take to trembling in every limb; his teeth chattered, his legs gave way, he stuttered and stammered, and exhibited, to the intense delight of the audience, every sign of utter cowardice.

This extravagant performance, that would have been out of place in any less wildly comic part, was at-

tributed by the public to the skill of the actor, who had evidently entered fully into the spirit of his part, and it proved most effective. Isabella alone had divined the cause of the Baron's emotion; it must be the presence in the audience of the insolent woman whose features had remained deeply imprinted in her memory. While she played, she cast occasional glances at the box where sat enthroned, in the calm, disdainful pride of a beauty conscious of her powers, the proud fair whom, in her humility she did not even venture to call her rival. She took bitter pleasure in assuring herself of Yolande's unquestionable superiority, and owned that no woman could hope to rival such a goddess. Yolande's dazzling beauty enabled her to understand the insensate love at times excited in common people by the unparalleled grace of some young queen beheld in a triumphal entry or other public function, — a love entailing madness, imprisonment, and death.

Sigognac had made up his mind not to look at Yolande, lest he should be overcome by sudden emotion, lose his memory, and make a show of himself on the stage. He did his best to control himself by keeping his eyes fixed, when the action of the play allowed him to do so, upon gentle Isabella. Her sweet face, marked

by a touch of sadness, due to the fact that in the play a cruel father sought to make her wed the man she disliked, quieted him; her love consoled him for the contempt of Yolande, and he drew from it renewed self-esteem that enabled him to go on with his part.

His torture at last came to an end; the play was over. But when Sigognac, who felt himself choking, took off his mask behind the scenes, his comrades were struck by the strange change in his features; he was absolutely livid, and dropped as if lifeless upon a bench that happened to be near. Blazius, seeing his condition, brought up a flagon of wine, saying that there was nothing better in such cases than a long drink of good liquor, but Sigognac signed that it was water only he wanted.

"A very bad thing," said the Pedant; "a serious error in diet. Water is fit only for frogs, fish, and teal, and is wholly unsuited to men. If apothecaries knew their business, they would write on the outside of carafes, 'For External Use Only.' Why, I should expire on the spot if I were to swallow a single drop of the tasteless stuff."

Notwithstanding the objections raised by Blazius, Sigognac drank down a whole jug of water, the cool-

ness of which entirely restored him, and made him look less wild than before.

"You played admirably and most comically," said Herod, approaching the Captain. "But it is unwise to play so hard, as you soon would break down. The comedian's art consists in taking care of himself and presenting the appearance of things only. He should be cool even when apparently given over to hottest excitement, and remain self-possessed when seemingly maddened with wrath. Never did any one incarnate so perfectly as you have just done the character of a Swashbuckler, with its magniloquence, its impertinence, and its craziness; and could you but repeat the effects you improvised to-day, you would bear away the palm as a comic actor."

"Ay, I did indeed play the part to the very life, did I not?" said the Baron bitterly. "I felt I was uncommonly idiotic and comical in the scene in which my head goes through the guitar with which Leander hits me."

"I must own," answered the Tyrant, "that your expression just then was the most utterly laughable and angry, at one and the same time, that any man could imagine. Mlle. Yolande de Foix, who is so beautiful,

proud, noble, and serious, actually condescended to smile. I saw her myself."

"A great honour for me, assuredly," said Sigognac, flushing, "to have entertained that beauty."

"Forgive me," said the Tyrant, noting the blush; "I forgot that the success which intoxicates us poor strolling players must necessarily be indifferent to a person of your rank, who cannot care for applause, no matter how illustrious its source."

"I am not offended, dear Herod," returned Sigognac, holding out his hand, "for a man should always do his best. But I could not help reflecting that in my youth I had dreamed of very different triumphs."

Isabella, who had been dressing to take part in the next piece, passed near Sigognac before going on, and cast upon him a consoling angel's glance, so full of tenderness, sympathy, and love, that it made him forget wholly and immediately both Yolande and his feeling of unhappiness. It acted upon him like a heavenly balm and healed the wounds of his pride; for a moment at least, such wounds being apt to re-open and to bleed anew.

The Marquis de Bruyères was in his place, and although very busy bestowing applause upon Zerbina

during the performance, he did not fail to call upon Yolande in her box, for he was acquainted with her and occasionally joined her on her hunting parties. Without naming Sigognac, he related to her the duel with the Duke de Vallombreuse, as he was better able than any one to do, since he had acted as second to one of the combatants.

"There is no need of being so discreet," answered Yolande, "for I had no difficulty in guessing that Captain Fracasse is Baron de Sigognac. You must remember that I saw him start from his old ruin in company with the wench, the gipsy girl who plays the parts of *ingénues* with such maidenly reserve," added she with a somewhat forced laugh; "and then he was at your place in the society of these people. I should scarcely have supposed from his rather stupid looks that he was so excellent a mummer and so doughty a fighter."

While chatting with Yolande, the Marquis looked round the hall, which he could now see better than from the seat he usually occupied close by the orchestra, and whence he could more easily follow Zerbina's performance. His attention was attracted by the masked lady, whom he had not hitherto seen, naturally enough,

since, his seat being in the front row, he turned his back upon the spectators, whose attention he did not particularly care to draw upon himself. Although she was closely wrapped up in black lace, it struck him that there was something in the mysterious lady's figure and attitude that dimly recalled his wife the Marchioness.

"It can't be," he said to himself; "she is at Bruyères, where I left her."

Then he noticed that she wore upon the ring finger of the hand which she coquettishly rested upon the edge of the box, as if to compensate herself for having to remain masked, a rather large solitaire diamond which the Marchioness was in the habit of wearing. This fact somewhat upset him, and he took his leave of Yolande and her uncle with the object of making sure he was not mistaken. Quickly, however, though he repaired to the box, he found the bird flown when he entered. The lady had taken fright and bolted. And very much put out and disgusted was he, though he piqued himself on taking such matters in very philosophical fashion.

"Can she be in love with that fool Leander?" said he to himself. "Well, I have fortunately had the fellow soundly thrashed beforehand, and so far I am all right."

Soothed by the thought, he went behind the scenes to join Zerbina, who was surprised at his delay, and who received him with the affected ill-temper that sort of woman uses to allure men with.

After the performance, Leander, troubled by the fact that the Marchioness had left so suddenly during the performance, hastened to the church square, where the page was wont to await him with the coach. He found the page alone, and was handed by him a letter together with a small and very heavy box. Having done this, the boy vanished in the darkness so quickly that, but for the fact of the letter and packet being in his hands, the actor might well have disbelieved his senses. Calling a lackey, who was passing with a lantern in his hand, on his way to seek his master in a neighbouring house, Leander hastily broke the seal with a trembling hand, and holding the paper close to the lantern which the man lifted for the purpose, read the following: —

"Dear Leander, — I am very much afraid my husband recognised me at the play, in spite of my mask. He stared at me so hard that I withdrew quickly in order not to be caught. Prudence, the foe of love, dictates

that we should not meet at the pavilion to-night. You might be watched, followed, killed perhaps. I say nothing of the dangers I might run myself. Until more favourable and convenient opportunity offers, pray wear the gold chain which my page will hand you. I hope that whenever you put it on, you will think of her who will never forget you and who will ever love you. This from her who, to you, is only MARY."

"And so farewell to my romance!" said Leander to himself, as he gave a coin or two to the lackey who had lighted him. "A pity, too! Ah! you lovely Marchioness, my love for you would have proved lasting; but the jealous fates would not permit it. Fear nothing, Madam; I shall not compromise you by indiscreet manifestations of my passion. That brutal husband of yours would murder me pitilessly, and plunge his steel into your white bosom. No, there must be none of those bloody scenes, better adapted to the tragic stage than to every-day life. At the cost of breaking my heart, I shall not seek to see you, and I shall be content with kissing this chain, less fragile and heavier than the bond that has united us for a moment. I wonder how much it is worth? A thou-

sand ducats, at the least, I should say from its weight. Well, it shows I am right to love the great only. The only trouble it entails is that you run the risk of being cudgelled or run through. On the whole, this intrigue has come to an end just at the right time; I have no reason to complain."

And being anxious to see his chain flash and gleam in the light, he returned to The French Arms in a fashion that was remarkably collected for a lover who had just received his dismissal.

When Isabella returned to her room, she found on the centre of the table a casket so placed as to forcibly attract attention. A folded paper was placed under one of the corners of the box, which evidently contained something precious, being itself very costly. The paper was not sealed and contained these words, written in a shaky handwriting, the letters having been traced with difficulty by a crippled hand: "For Isabella."

A flush of anger rose to the actress' cheek at the sight of the gift, which would have caused many a virtuous woman to waver. She did not even gratify her feminine curiosity by opening the casket, but called in Master Bilot, who had not yet gone to bed, having to prepare a supper for a number of lords, and told him

to take the box away and return it to the person who had sent it, for she would not tolerate its remaining in her room another minute.

Boniface pretended to be greatly astonished, and swore by all that was holy, an oath as binding upon him as the oath by the Styx was upon the dwellers in Olympus, that he did not know how the casket had got there, though he could make a shrewd guess as to where it came from. In this he spoke the truth, for it was dame Leonardo whom the Duke had approached, being of opinion that an old woman will succeed where even the devil himself can do nothing, and she it was who had sneaked in and laid the jewels on the table while Isabella was out. But this time the damnable female had bargained to do more than she could accomplish, having trusted too much to the corrupting power of gems and gold, a power that affects base souls only.

"Take the thing out," said Isabella to Bilot. "Return the abominable box to whomsoever it belongs, and above all, do not breathe a word of the matter to Captain Fracasse. Although I am wholly blameless, he might become angry and break out in a way that would injure my character."

Master Bilot admired the disinterestedness of the young actress,who had not condescended to glance, even, at gems that would have turned a duchess' head, and who sent them back contemptuously as if they were plaster-of-Paris sweets or empty nut-shells. He withdrew, bowing as respectfully as to a queen, so taken aback was he by such virtue.

Greatly agitated and troubled, Isabella, after Bilot had gone, opened the window to cool her cheeks and brow in the night air. Through the branches of the trees she could see a light shining in the dark front of Vallombreuse House, no doubt in the room of the wounded Duke. The lane appeared to be deserted, yet Isabella, endowed with the keen hearing of an actress, thought she heard some one whisper very softly, "She has not yet gone to bed."

Startled by this, she bent forward a little and thought she could make out, at the foot of the wall, in the shadow, two human forms, cloaked, and motionless as stone statues in a church porch. At the other end of the lane she perceived, in spite of the darkness, a third figure apparently on watch.

Seeing that their presence was detected, the mysterious beings disappeared, or concealed themselves more

carefully, for Isabella neither saw nor heard anything more. Tired of watching, and believing she had been deceived by her senses, she gently closed her window, shot the bolt of her door, placed the light at her bedside, and lay down, a prey to a strange, undefined anxiety which all the reasoning she indulged in failed to allay. For, indeed, what could she have to fear in an inn full of people, close by her friends, and in a room the door of which was duly and carefully locked and bolted? What possible connection could there be between herself and the shadows she had got a glimpse of at the foot of the wall, and that were no doubt cut-purses awaiting a victim and bothered by the light in her room?

All these reasons were very sound, but they failed to reassure her, and she was oppressed with dreadful presentiments. But for the fear of being laughed at, she would have risen and taken refuge with one of her companions; Zerbina, however, was not alone, and Serafina did not like her, while she felt an instinctive repugnance for the duenna. She therefore remained a prey to indescribable terror. The slightest cracking of the woodwork, the faintest sputtering of the candle, the unsnuffed wick of which was charring, startled and

drove her to shelter under the sheets, terrified lest she should see some monstrous shape in the dark corners of the room. Then she would regain her courage, and look round the chamber to find there was nothing suspicious or unnatural about it.

In the upper portion of one of the walls was cut a round window, no doubt for the purpose of lighting a dark closet. It showed on the gray wall, in the faint gleam of the light, like a huge black Cyclopean eye spying on the young girl. Isabella could not keep her eyes off the dark, deep cavity, which was barred with an iron grating in the form of a cross. There was nothing to be feared on that side, certainly, yet at one time Isabella fancied she saw a pair of human eyes shining in the shadow there.

Ere long a brown face, with long, dishevelled hair, was passed through the narrow space between two of the bars ; next a pair of shoulders, that were somewhat bruised by the grating, and then a little girl eight or ten years of age, clutching the edge of the opening, stretched herself out as far as she could down the wall, and dropped to the floor as noiselessly as a feather or a snow-flake.

Isabella remained motionless, petrified and stiff with

terror, so that the child imagined she was asleep; and when she drew near to ascertain whether the young lady's sleep was sound, her brown features expressed the liveliest surprise.

"The Necklace lady!" she exclaimed, fingering the pearls which rustled round her thin brown neck. "The Necklace lady!"

At the same time Isabella, half dead with terror, had recognised the little girl she had met at the Inn of the Blue Sun, and again on the road to Bruyères in company with Agostino. She tried to call for help, but the child put her hand on her mouth.

"Do not call, you run no danger; for Chiquita told you she would never cut the throat of the lady who gave her the pearls she wanted to steal."

"But what are you doing here, child?" asked Isabella, who recovered some of her courage at the sight of the weak and sickly girl, who not only could not possibly be very dangerous, but, besides, evidently felt a sort of strange and wild gratitude.

"I came to push back the bolt you shoot every night," answered Chiquita, very quietly and as if wholly unaware that there was anything reprehensible in the act. "I was picked out to do it because I am

as slippery and slender as an eel. There are very few holes I cannot get through."

"And why did they want to have the bolt pushed back? To rob me?"

"Oh! no," replied Chiquita, with a disdainful air. "It was to let the men get into your room and carry you off."

"The Lord have mercy upon me! I am lost!" exclaimed Isabella with a moan, and clasping her hands.

"No, you are not," returned Chiquita; "for I shall leave the bolt fast. They will not venture to break in the door, for that would make a noise; the people of the inn would be roused and the men would be caught. They are not quite such fools."

"I would have screamed, clung to the walls, and made myself heard."

"A gag stops all shouting," said Chiquita, with the pride of an artist explaining the tricks of his trade to an ignoramus, "and a blanket wrapped round the body, all kicking. It's the easiest thing in the world. The stable-boy was bribed, and he was to open the back-door."

"Who devised that wicked plot?" asked the poor actress, shuddering at the peril she had run.

"The nobleman who gave the money, oh! lots of money; like that, as much as your two hands could hold," returned Chiquita, whose eyes blazed with fierce covetousness. "But it does not matter; you gave me the pearls. I shall tell the men you were not asleep, that there was a man in your room, and that the trick has failed. That will make them go off. Let me look at you; you are beautiful, and I love you. Yes, I love you almost as much as Agostino. Why!" said she, observing the knife found in the wagon, "there's the knife I lost; it was my father's knife. Keep it, it is good steel.

"'For the bite of the snake
Is no remedy known.'

"You see, all you have to do is to turn the ferule this way, and then stab this way, upwards, for the blade goes in deeper. Put it in your bosom, and if ever naughty men want to take liberties with you, you can rip them up," said the child, illustrating her remarks with appropriate gestures.

As she listened to the lecture on the art of using a knife, delivered at night, under such strange circumstances, by a wan-faced and half-crazy thief of a child, Isabella felt as if oppressed by a nightmare.

"Take a good grip of the knife with your fingers; there, like that. No one will hurt you now. So good-bye, I 'm off. Good-bye, and don't forget Chiquita!"

Then Agostino's little accomplice placed a chair against the wall, climbed upon it, rose on tiptoe, caught hold of the iron bar, braced herself, and pressing her feet against the wall with a quick movement, she speedily reached the edge of the round window, through which she vanished humming a sort of prose ditty: —

"Chiquita can go through keyholes, and she can dance on the tops of railings and broken bottles without hurting herself. It will take a sharp one to catch her."

Isabella lay awake until daybreak, which she awaited impatiently, for she could not sleep, so thoroughly had she been upset by the occurrences of the night. She was not, however, further disturbed; but when she came down the next morning to the dining-room, her comrades were startled by her pallor and the deep circles round her eyes. She was assailed with questions, and related her nocturnal adventure. Sigognac, maddened, proposed nothing less than attacking the residence of the Duke de Vallombreuse, whom he regarded as the instigator of the rascally attempt.

"In my opinion," said Blazius, "we ought to lose no time in folding up our tents, and losing, or saving ourselves rather, in the ocean of Paris. Matters are looking bad round here."

The players adopted the Pedant's advice, and the start was fixed for the morrow.

XI

THE PONT-NEUF

IT would be long and tiresome to follow the successive stages of the players' chariot on its way to Paris, the great city. They had no adventures worth mentioning on the way; the common purse was well filled, and they could afford to proceed at a round pace, having the means to hire good horses and to push on. The company stopped at Tours and Orléans, in each of which places they gave a number of performances, the receipts from which amply satisfied Herod, who, as manager and treasurer, thought more of pecuniary than of artistic success. Blazius was regaining confidence and beginning to smile at the thought of the terror the Duke de Vallombreuse had inspired him with by his vindictive character. On the other hand, Isabella still trembled when she remembered the unsuccessful attempt to carry her off; and although she slept in the same room as Serafina, she more than once saw in her dreams Chiquita's wild,

haggard face grinning at her with its row of shining teeth out of a dark window. Terrified by the vision, she would cry out and awake; her companion in such cases finding it very difficult to get her quieted. Sigognac did not give outward signs of anxiety, but he always slept fully dressed in the room nearest that of the girls, his sword under his pillow in case of a night alarm. By day he generally went on foot ahead of the chariot, to make sure the road was clear, especially when there were bushes, thickets, walls, or ruined huts that might conceal an ambuscade. When he caught sight of a suspicious-looking group of travellers, he would fall back upon the chariot, to which the Tyrant, Scappino, Blazius, and Leander formed a very respectable escort, even though of the two latter the one was old and the other timid as a hare. At other times, like a wise general who takes care to anticipate the tricks of the enemy, he walked behind the chariot, for the peril might just as well come from that quarter. All these precautions, however, proved needless and supererogatory, for the company was not once attacked; either because the Duke had not had time to arrange for a dash upon the actors, because he had given up his fancy, or because the pain of his wound told on his courage.

Though it was winter the season proved mild. Well fed, and having taken care to provide themselves with warm clothing of thicker stuff than the serge of which stage mantles are made, the players did not suffer from the cold, and the north wind merely brought to the cheeks of the young actresses a livelier rose-flush than usual, and at times caused it to extend to their pretty noses. These winter roses, though a little out of place, by no means spoiled their looks, for everything is becoming to lovely women. As for dame Leonardo, neither wind nor storm could produce any effect upon her complexion, worn as it was by forty years' service.

At last, at about four in the afternoon, they arrived close to the great city, on the Bièvre side; they crossed the footbridge over that stream, and proceeded along the bank of the Seine, most illustrious of rivers, whose waters have the honour of laving the palace of our kings and many more buildings renowned the world over. The smoke ascending from the chimneys of the houses formed a great bank of reddish, semi-transparent fog on the horizon, and behind this bank the sun was going down, a red, rayless globe. Against the back-ground of dull light stood out the violet-coloured mass

of the private, public, and ecclesiastical buildings which filled in the prospect on this side. On the other bank of the river, beyond Louviers Island, were seen the Arsenal and the Celestine monastery, and more nearly opposite, the point of Notre-Dame Island. But once they had passed through the Saint Bernard gate, they enjoyed a magnificent spectacle. Notre-Dame rose in front, seen from the east, with its apse and the mighty flying buttresses, looking like the backbones of giant fish, its two square towers, and the light spire at the intersection of the nave and transepts. Other less lofty spires told of other churches and chapels set within the maze of houses, and jutted out black against the luminous band in the heavens. It was the Cathedral, however, that most attracted Sigognac's attention, for he had never before been in Paris, and the vast size of the building astounded him.

Accustomed to the everlasting loneliness of the moors and to the deathly silence of his old ruinous castle, he was dazed and deafened by the rumbling of the carts laden with goods of all kinds, the numbers of horsemen and pedestrians who crowded the river bank and the streets into which the chariot every now and then drove by way of making a short cut, and by the calls

and cries of the multitude. He felt as if a mill-wheel were spinning round in his head, and he walked with unsteady gait like a drunken man.

Presently the delicately traceried spire of the Sainte-Chapelle, flushed with the tints of sunset, shot up above the roofs of the Palace of Justice. Lights came out here and there and dotted the sombre façades of the houses with little red sparks, while the river reflected all these flashes and lengthened them out like serpents in its dark waters. Then in the growing obscurity, along the quay, became visible the church and cloister of the Augustinian monks, and on the platform of the Pont-Neuf, on his right, Sigognac perceived the dim outline of an equestrian statue, that of the good King Henry IV., but the horse and its rider soon vanished from sight as the chariot turned the corner of the Rue Dauphine, newly laid out through the convent property.

There was in the Rue Dauphine, near the Dauphine gate, a large hostelry where occasionally put up embassies come from strange, unknown countries, and which was capable of accommodating a numerous company without previous intimation of its arrival. There was always fodder in the mangers for the animals, and travellers never failed to secure beds. This was

the place Herod had fixed upon as a suitable camping ground for his theatrical tribe. The satisfactory condition of the exchequer warranted this indulgence, which, besides, served a useful purpose, inasmuch as it vouched for the respectability of the company and betokened that it was no mere band of vagabonds, swindlers, and debauchees, driven by hard necessity to take up the wretched profession of strolling players, but a troupe of honest actors whose talent enabled them to earn a handsome living; which is quite a possible case, as is proved by the reasons set forth by Master Pierre de Corneille, the famous poet, in his play "The Comic Illusion."

The kitchen into which the players entered until their rooms had been prepared, was large enough to accommodate comfortably Gargantua or Pantagruel and their guests. On the huge fireplace blazed, crackled, and roared great logs, making the chimney look like the mouth of Hell in the great Douai play. On several spits, ranged one above another, and turned by a dog tearing round inside a wheel like one possessed, were roasting strings of geese, pullets, and capons; quarters of beef were browning, loins of veal were cooking, besides partridges, snipe, quails, and other small birds. A

scullion boy, half baked himself and streaming with perspiration, though clad merely in a linen jacket, kept pouring gravy over the victuals with a long ladle that he plunged into the dripping-pan as soon as he had emptied it, — a piece of work as hard as that of the Danaïds, for the gravy he ladled up at once ran back.

Round a long oak table, covered with dishes in various stages of preparation, bustled an army of cooks, carving-men, and sauce-makers, who handed to their assistants the meat larded, trussed, and spiced, to be put into the ovens which, incandescent with live coals and crackling with sparks, resembled Vulcan's forge more than culinary ovens, while the cook-boys themselves looked like Cyclops in the fiery vapour. On the walls glittered a tremendous array of kitchen ware in copper and tin : boilers, stewpans of different sizes, fishpans, in which leviathans might have been set in to simmer in wine and herbs, pastry moulds in the shape of donjons, domes, diminutive temples, helmets, and turbans of Saracenic aspect, — in a word, all the offensive and defensive weapons that are to be found in the arsenal of the god Gaster.

And all the time rushed in from the pantry stout servant-maids, with blowzy red cheeks, such as

Flemish painters put into their pictures, who bore on their heads or rested on their hips baskets full of provisions.

"Hand me the nutmeg!" cried one man. "Give me cinnamon!" shouted another. "This way with the spice-box! Let us have salt in the cellar! Nutmegs! Bay leaves! A very thin slice of bacon, please! Blow up that fire, it is not burning properly! Put out that one, or everything will be burned up like chestnuts forgotten on the stove! Pour some gravy into that soup! Water for the brown sauce, it is getting too thick! Whip those whites of egg smartly, they are not coming up properly! Dust that ham with bread crumbs! Take that gosling off the spit; it is done to a turn! Smartly there, take off that beef; it must be just underdone! Leave the veal and the chickens, for —

> "'Underdone veal and ill-cooked chick
> Fill the graves with dead men thick.'

"Remember that, my lad. It is not every man who can become a cook; it is a gift of heaven. Carry that soup to number 6. Who has ordered quails with bread-crumb-crust? Dish up quickly that larded saddle of hare!"

In this lively, noisy fashion were exchanged terms of good cheer and words of fat eating that better deserved to be so called than the frozen ones Panurge heard when the Polar ice thawed, for they all referred to some dish, condiment, or delicacy.

Herod, Blazius, and Scappino, who were each and all remarkably fond of good living and as dainty as an old devotee spinster's cat, licked their chops as they listened to this sort of eloquence, so rich, so succulent and so marrowy that they loudly declared it to be preferable to that of Isocrates, Demosthenes, Æschinus, Hortensius, Cicero, and other babblers, whose phrases are but empty food, void of medullary juice.

"I feel like kissing that stout cook on both cheeks," said Blazius. "He is as fat and paunchy as a monk, and bosses all his saucepans in royal fashion. Never did hero face fire more splendidly than he."

Just as a servant came to inform the players that their rooms were ready, a traveller entered the kitchen and drew near the fireplace. He was a man some thirty years of age, tall, slight, athletic, with regular but repulsive features. The fire lighted up his profile, while the rest of his face was lost in shadow. The touch of light brought out a prominent eyebrow, under

which flashed a hard, inquisitive eye; an aquiline nose, the end of which hooked over a thick mustache; a very thin lower lip merging at once into a thick, short chin, as if nature had not had the wherewithal to complete his face. The neck, that rose above a starched plain linen cravat, was thin and showed markedly the cartilage which old women account for by saying that it is a piece of the fatal apple stuck in Adam's throat, which his descendants have never yet managed to swallow. His dress consisted of an iron-gray cloth doublet fastened with hooks and eyes over a buff jerkin; of brown trunks and felt boots coming up above the knees and wrinkling over his legs. Many mud-stains, some dry, others still fresh, proved he had ridden far, and the blood-stained rowels of his spurs testified that the horseman had been compelled, in order to finish his journey, to use them remorselessly upon the flanks of his weary steed. A long rapier, the iron shell-hilt of which weighed a full pound, was suspended by a broad leather belt, fastened with a brass buckle, and drawn tight round the fellow's thin waist. A dark-coloured cloak which he had thrown upon a settle, together with his hat, completed his costume. It was difficult to say exactly to what class he belonged; plainly he was

neither merchant, citizen, nor soldier. It was most likely that he was some poor member of the inferior aristocracy, of the sort who turn retainers to some great lord and attach themselves to his fortunes.

Sigognac, who cared not for things culinary to the extent that Herod or Blazius did, and who was not absorbed in the contemplation of the alluring victuals, examined attentively the tall rascal, whose face he thought he knew, although he could not remember where or when he had come upon him. He racked his memory in vain ; he failed to find what he wanted. Yet he was conscious that it was not the first time he had come across the mysterious individual, who, objecting to the inquisitorial examination to which he was being subjected, turned his back upon the people in the kitchen and bent over the fireplace under pretext of warming his hands.

As his memory played him false, and as his persistent curiosity might have given rise to a needless quarrel, the Baron followed the actors, who took possession of their respective rooms, and, after having dressed a bit, assembled in a lower room in which the supper had been served, and did justice to the fare like hungry and thirsty men that they were. Blazius smacked his

lips and pronounced the wine good, pouring himself out many a bumper, but not forgetting to replenish his comrades' glasses, for he was no selfish toper paying court to Bacchus in solitude, and he was almost as fond of making others drink as of drinking himself. The Tyrant and Scappino drank glass for glass with him, but Leander was afraid, if he indulged too largely, of spoiling the fairness of his complexion and adorning his nose with grog blossoms, an ornament by no means desirable in one who played lovers' parts. Sigognac had practised temperance for so many years in his home, that he had acquired a Castilian habit of sobriety which he found it extremely difficult to depart from. Besides, his mind was filled with the thought of the fellow he had seen in the kitchen, and who struck him as being a suspicious character, although he could not have said why, for after all there was nothing out of the way in the arrival of a traveller at a frequented inn.

The meal was a lively one; excited by wine and good cheer, glad to have reached Paris at last, the Eldorado of all people with plans to carry out, enjoying the warm temperature of the room after the long hours spent in the cold in the chariot, the players indulged in

the wildest hopes. They rivalled, in imagination, the actors of the Hôtel de Bourgogne and of the Théâtre du Marais; they already beheld themselves applauded and made welcome, called to Court, ordering plays from the leading wits of the day, treating poets contemptuously, invited to entertainments given by great lords, and ere long driving in their own carriages. As for Leander, he was dreaming of conquests in the highest ranks of society, and scarcely condescended to stop short at the Queen. He had not drunk wine, but he was intoxicated with vanity. Since his affair with the Marchioness de Bruyères, he really thought himself irresistible, and his conceit knew no bounds. Serafina had made up her mind to remain faithful to the Chevalier de Vidaline only until a richer and greater man should come along. Zerbina, having her Marquis, who was to join her, formed no plans, and dame Leonardo's age put her out of the question, for all she could do was to act as messenger; she therefore wasted no time on all this nonsense and ate steadily. Blazius kept filling her plate and her glass with burlesque rapidity, the old lady taking the joke in very good part.

Isabella had long since finished, and was dreamily engaged in moulding a piece of bread into the shape

of a dove, while casting on her beloved Sigognac, seated at the other end of the table, glances filled with chaste love and angelic tenderness. The warmth of the room had flushed her cheeks, but now wan from the fatigue of the day's journey, and she was so adorably beautiful that if the young Duke de Vallombreuse had seen her then, his passion for her would have been excited to madness.

Sigognac, also, was gazing upon Isabella with respectful admiration, for the noble sentiments of the girl moved him as deeply as her numerous charms, and he regretted that she should have refused to marry him through excess of sensibility.

When the meal was ended, the women withdrew, as did also Leander and the Baron, leaving the trio of confirmed topers to finish the partially emptied bottles, a performance that did not commend itself to the servant whose business it was to bring in the liquor; but a tip, in the shape of a silver coin, consoled him for the loss of his perquisites.

"Barricade yourself carefully in your room," said Sigognac, as he escorted Isabella to the door of her apartment. "There are all sorts of people in inns such as this, and you cannot be too careful."

"You need not fear for me, Baron," replied the young actress. "There is a triple lock on my door that would answer for a prison gate, besides a bolt as long as my arm. The window is grated, and there is no round sash with its dark orifice in the wall. Travellers often carry with them valuables that tempt the cupidity of thieves, and consequently their rooms must be secure. Never was fairy princess, threatened with a spell, safer in her dragon-guarded tower."

"Sometimes spells fail," returned Sigognac, "and the enemy manages to enter in spite of phylacteries, tetragrams, and cabalistic formulæ."

"Only when the princess, weary of being shut up, although for her own good, favours the foe through curiosity or love; but such is not my case. Therefore, while more timid than a doe that hears the sound of the horn and the baying of the pack, I am not afraid; and you ought to feel secure, for you are brave as Alexander and Cæsar. Go to bed, and sleep soundly."

And by way of good-night, she held out to Sigognac a slender, soft hand which, as well as any duchess, she knew how to preserve white by the use of talc powder, cucumber paste, and prepared gloves. After she had

entered her room, Sigognac heard the key turn in the lock, the latch fall in the hasp, and the bolt creak in most reassuring fashion. Just as he was stepping into his own room, however, he saw on the wall, in the light of the lantern that lighted up the passage, the shadow of a man whose approach he had not noticed, and who almost brushed by him. It was the stranger he had remarked in the kitchen, and who, no doubt, was on his way to the room assigned him by the host. There was nothing out of the way in that, yet Sigognac, pretending he could not find the keyhole in his door, watched the suspicious character, whose appearance so greatly troubled him, until he disappeared round a corner. The noisy closing of a door, heard all the more loudly in the silence that had now fallen upon the inn, informed him that the stranger had reached his apartment, which evidently lay in a distant part of the house.

Not feeling sleepy, Sigognac sat down to indite a letter to the worthy Peter, as he had promised he would do on reaching Paris. He took care to write in a very legible hand, the faithful servant not being much of a scholar and unable to do much more than spell out print. The letter read as follows : —

"My good Peter, — Here am I in Paris at last, where, I am told, I shall make my fortune and restore my decayed house, although I own I do not see how I am going to accomplish these things. However, some fortunate chance may enable me to get to Court, and if I am lucky enough to get speech of the King, the fountainhead of all favours, His Majesty may prove willing to take into account the services rendered by my ancestors. The King will surely not suffer that a noble family that ruined itself in the wars, should die out so wretchedly. In the meantime, for lack of other means of support, I have taken to play-acting, and I have succeeded, in this way, in earning a few pistoles, some of which I shall send you when I find a safe mode of doing so. I should perhaps have done better to enlist as a soldier in some company, but I did not wish to part with my freedom of action, and, besides, poor as a man may be, it is unpleasant for him to have to obey, when his ancestors have always commanded, and he himself has never taken orders from any one. Then, too, my solitary life has rendered me somewhat unsociable and independent.

"The only adventure I have had on my long trip has been a duel with a very wicked duke, a great swords-

man, but, thanks to your excellent teaching, I came out of the business covered with glory. I ran the fellow through the arm, and I could easily have killed him, for he is not as good at defence as at attack, being fiery rather than prudent, and quick rather than steady. He gave me more than one opening, and I could have despatched him with one of those irresistible lunges you taught me so patiently in our prolonged matches in the lower hall at Sigognac, the only place the floor of which was capable of standing the stamping, and where we killed time, limbered up our arms, and tired ourselves out in order to be sure to sleep. Your pupil did you honour, and I gained immensely in the respect of the public after that victory, which was really too easily won. It would seem that I am actually a first-class swordsman, in the very first flight of gladiators. But enough on this point.

"I often think, in spite of the distractions that fill my new mode of life, of the poor old place which is falling into ruins upon the tombs of my family, and in which I spent my melancholy youth. From this distance it does not appear as sad and gloomy as it did then. Indeed, there are times when I traverse in

thought its deserted halls, look at the portraits yellowed by age that were so long my only companions, crushing under foot a piece of a broken pane, and I take a sort of melancholy pleasure in these reminiscences. How I should delight in seeing again your kind old face, tanned by the sun and illumined at my approach by that cordial smile of yours! And, there is no reason why I should blush to say it, I would give much to hear once more the purring of Beelzebub, the barking of Miraut, and the neighing of poor Bayard, who was wont to collect all his failing strength to carry me along, light weight though I was. Do these dear animals still love me? Do they seem to remember me and to regret me? Have you managed, in that habitation of poverty, to keep them from starving to death, and to spare a little of your own meagre pittance for them? Do try, all of you, to keep alive until I return, whether in poverty or in wealth, happy or desperate, so that we may all end our lives together, as fate may will, in the place where we have suffered in company. If I am to be the last of the Sigognacs, God's will be done! There is yet a vacant place for me in our ancestral mortuary chapel.

"Baron de Sigognac."

The Baron sealed his letter with a signet ring, the only jewel left him by his father, and on which were engraved three storks on a field azure. Then he addressed it, and put it into his pocket-book until such time as a courier should be leaving for Gascony. From the castle of Sigognac, to which his thoughts of Peter had transported him, he returned to Paris and the existing condition of matters. Although it was now late, he could hear all around him the low rumour of the great city, which, no more than the sound of the ocean, is ever stilled. Now it was a horse's steps, now the rumbling of carriage-wheels dying out in the distance, a song trolled by a belated reveller, the crash of sword-blades, the cry of a pedestrian assaulted by cut-purses on the bridge, the howl of a dog, or other similar indistinct sounds.

Sigognac fancied, however, that among these noises he could make out in the passage the step of a booted man, walking gently, as if anxious not to be heard. He blew out his candle, so that the light should not betray him, and softly opening his door, he caught sight, in the dark corridor, of a man carefully wrapped up in a dark-coloured cloak, who was going towards the room of that other traveller whose appearance had

struck him as suspicious. Presently another fellow, whose boots creaked in spite of his attempts to walk lightly, proceeded in the same direction. Half an hour had scarcely passed when a third rascal of most unprepossessing mien, showed up in the faint light of the lantern, just about going out, and walked down the passage. Like the others, he was armed, and his cape was cocked up behind by a long thrusting sword. The shadow cast over his face by the brim of a beaver with black plumes prevented his features from being made out.

This procession of scoundrels struck Sigognac as altogether ill-timed and peculiar, while the fact that the men were four in number reminded him of the ambush to which he had nearly fallen a victim in the lane at Poictiers, when leaving the theatre after his quarrel with the Duke de Vallombreuse. This recollection was like a flash of light, and he immediately recognised the fellow whose face had so bothered him in the kitchen as being the rascal whose attack upon him might have proved successful had he not been on his guard. He was the very one whom he had tumbled over, heels over head, his hat driven down to his eyes, with the stroke of his swashbuckler sword. The

others were no doubt his companions, who had been so valiantly routed by Herod and Scappino. By what chance, or rather, in the execution of what plot did they happen to turn up all together in the inn on the very night the company of players had taken up its quarters there? It was plain they must have followed the chariot stage by stage. Yet Sigognac had kept a bright look-out upon the road, though of course it is difficult to ascertain that a horseman is a foe, when he rides by with an indifferent air, and does not stop, scarcely casting the merest inattentive look upon you, a look called out by any incident of travel. What was quite certain was that neither the love nor the hate of the young Duke was lulled to sleep, and that he was endeavouring to satisfy the one and the other. He meant his vengeance to get the better both of Isabella and of Sigognac.

Personally very brave, the Baron did not fear, so far as he himself was concerned, the attacks the quartet of hired cut-throats might make upon him, knowing well that the mere flash of his good sword would put them to flight; for they would assuredly not prove braver armed with rapiers than with sticks. But he did dread some cowardly and subtile attempt against the

young actress. He therefore took his precautions, and resolved not to go to bed. Lighting every candle in his room, he threw his door wide-open, so that a blaze of light fell upon the opposite wall, right against Isabella's door. Then he seated himself quietly, after having placed his drawn sword and dagger ready to his hand in case of need. For a long time his watch was unrewarded. The chimes of the Samaritaine and the bells of the nearer Augustinian convent had struck two, when a soft rustling was heard, and soon in the bright square of light cast upon the wall appeared, looking very undecided, sheepish, and much put out, the first rascal, who was none else than Mérindol, one of the Duke de Vallombreuse's ruffians. Sigognac was standing at his own door, sword in hand, equally ready to defend himself or to attack, and with so bold, fierce, and defiant an air that Mérindol sneaked by head down and mute. The other three, who were following in Indian file, startled by the glare of light in the centre of which blazed the formidable nobleman, slid away as quickly as they could, the last of them, indeed, dropping a crowbar with which he had no doubt intended to pry open Captain Fracasse's door while the latter was sound asleep. The Baron mocked them with a

derisive gesture, and presently the sound of horses being brought out of the stables, was heard in the yard. The four scoundrels, having failed to bring off their attempt, were cutting away as fast as they could.

At breakfast, Herod said to Sigognac : —

" Captain, are you not curious to see something of the city, one of the largest in the world, and of which so many tales are told ? If it is agreeable to you, I shall be glad to act as your guide and pilot, for I am thoroughly acquainted with every reef, rock, shoal, Euripes, Charybdis, and Scylla of this ocean, so dangerous to strangers and country people, having sailed among them in my youth. I shall be your Palinurus, and you may rely on my not tumbling into the sea, like the one spoken of by Vergilius Maro. We are in the best possible place to watch the show, the Pont-Neuf being to Paris what the Via Sacra was to Rome, that is, the parade ground, meeting-place and peripatetic gallery of newsmongers, simpletons, poets, swindlers, cut-purses, acrobats, courtesans, gentlemen, townsmen, soldiers, and people of all sorts and conditions."

" I much like your proposal, my dear Herod, but pray ask Scappino to remain and to keep his eye upon any people coming and going whose ways are in the

least suspicious. Let him not leave Isabella; Vallombreuse is determined to be avenged, and his tools are all around us. Last night I came again upon the four scoundrels we laid out in such right good fashion in the lane at Poictiers. As I was sitting up, fearing that some attempt might be made against our young friend, they failed to carry out their purpose, and on finding they were discovered, made off on their horses that were standing in the stables, ready saddled, on the pretext that they had to make an early start."

"I do not believe," replied the Tyrant, "that they would venture to make any attempt by day, for help would come at the least outcry, and besides, they must still feel pretty sore at having failed. So Scappino, Blazius, and Leander will form a guard sufficient for Isabella until we return. But in case of any quarrel or similar trouble befalling us while we are out, I shall buckle on my sword so as to back you up in case of need."

Whereupon the Tyrant girded round his majestic paunch a broad belt from which depended a long and strong rapier. Over one shoulder he threw a short cloak that could not possibly hamper his freedom of motion, and pulled down over his eyes his beaver with

the red feather, for a man has to beware, when crossing bridges, of the puffs of wind that blow a hat into the stream uncommonly quickly, to the intense joy of pages, lackeys, and street-boys. That was the reason that led Herod to pull his hat well down, but it had also occurred to him that it might afterwards injure Sigognac if he were seen walking in public with a strolling player. He therefore concealed, as carefully as he could, his face so well-known to the crowd.

At the corner of the Rue Dauphine, Herod pointed out to Sigognac, under the porch of the Augustinian monastery, people who were buying meat seized on the butcher's stalls on forbidden days, and who were fighting to get a piece at a low price. He also showed him the newsmongers, busy discussing the fate of kingdoms, changing the frontiers of countries as they pleased, dividing up empires, and reporting word for word everything ministers alone in their own rooms had said. This was the place where were sold gazettes, pamphlets, satirical productions, and other small printed papers smuggled quietly around. All these curious people were pale, crazy-looking, and very badly dressed.

"We shall not waste time listening to the trash

they talk," said Herod, "or we shall never get along. Unless, of course, you would care to learn the contents of the Sophi of Persia's latest edict, or to make yourself acquainted with the ceremonial in force at the court of Prester John. Let us go on a little farther, and we shall see one of the finest sights in the world, such as even the theatres do not present in their elaborately mounted and set plays."

And indeed, the prospect that opened out before Sigognac and his friend, once they had traversed the arches built over the branch of the stream, was then and is now unparalleled in the world. The foreground was formed by the bridge itself, with graceful semi-circular recesses above each pier. The Pont-Neuf was not lumbered up, like the Pont au Change and the Pont Saint-Michel, with two rows of lofty houses. The great King who had ordered its erection did not wish that mean and ugly buildings should obstruct the view of the sumptuous palace, the home of our kings, the whole length of which can be seen from this point.

On the piece of ground which forms the point of the island, the good King, calm as Marcus Aurelius, bestrode his bronze steed at the top of a pedestal, against the four corners of which leaned four prisoners,

also in metal, writhing in their bonds. It was enclosed by a railing in hammered iron-work, with rich volutes, by way of protecting the base against the irreverent familiarities of the populace, for at times, making their way over the railing, street-boys were wicked enough to climb up behind the debonair monarch, and this more particularly on the occasion of a royal entry or an interesting execution. The sombre tone of the bronze stood out strongly against the sky and the background of distant hills seen beyond the Pont Rouge.

On the left bank, the spire of the old Romanesque church of Saint-Germain des Prés, and the tall roofs of the Hôtel de Nevers, a great palace that was never finished, shot up above the houses. A little farther, a tower, the one remaining relic of the Hôtel de Nesle, bathed its base in the stream, amid a mass of débris, and though long since fallen into ruin, yet figured proudly on the horizon. Beyond it, again, stretched the Grenouillière, and through the dim azure haze could be seen against the sky-line the three crosses planted on top of Calvary, otherwise Mount Valérien.

The Louvre splendidly filled up the right bank, brilliantly gilded by the bright sunbeams, luminous rather than warm, as is the case with winter sunshine,

but which brought out in remarkable relief the details of an architecture at once rich and noble. The long gallery that connects the Tuileries and the Louvre, a marvellous architectural arrangement that enables the King to be alternately, as he pleases, in his good city or in the country, displayed its unparalleled beauties, its delicate carvings, its ornamented cornices, its vermiculated boss-work, its columns and pilasters that equalled the work of the cleverest of Greek and Roman architects.

From the corner of Charles IX's balcony, the building was set back, allowing space for gardens and for parasitical erections, mushrooms growing at the foot of the ancient edifice. Along the quay swelled the arches of culverts, and somewhat farther down stream than the Tower de Nesle rose another tower, a relic of the old Louvre of Charles V, which flanked the gate built between the palace and the river. These two old towers, paired after the Gothic fashion, faced each other diagonally, and greatly contributed to the charm of the prospect. They recalled feudal times, and among the recent architecture, in such good taste, stood out as among modern furniture, covered with silver and gilding, stands out an old chair or an old oaken

dresser, curiously wrought. These relics of bygone ages impart to a city an appearance of respectability, and they should on no consideration be destroyed.

At the end of the Tuileries garden, where the city ended, was to be seen the Conference gate, and along the river, beyond the garden, the Cours-la-Reine with its trees, the favourite driving-ground of courtiers and people of rank who repaired thither to show off their equipages.

The two banks which I have rapidly sketched, framed in the animated scene on the river, which was traversed by boats passing from one side to the other, and obstructed by barges moored and drawn up near the banks, some laden with hay, others with wood, others again with diverse cargoes. Near the quay, at the foot of the Louvre, the royal galleys attracted the eyes by their carved and gilded ornaments and their colours bearing the arms of France.

Returning towards the bridge, the finials of Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois were seen projecting above the sharp gables of the houses, that looked like cards propped up against each other. Having gazed sufficiently long upon this prospect, Herod led Sigognac opposite the façade of the Samaritaine.

"Although this is the rallying-point of simpletons, who spend a long time here waiting to see the metal bell-ringer strike the hour upon the gong of the clock, we must even come and do likewise. A little gaping round does not ill beseem a newly arrived traveller. It would be more affected than sensible to frown upon what delights the masses."

Thus did the Tyrant apologise to his friend for keeping him standing now on one foot, now on the other, in front of the little pumping station, waiting until, the hands having reached the hour, the joyous chimes should break out, and start the figure of Jesus, in gilt lead, speaking to the Samaritan woman leaning on the edge of the well, the astronomical dial with the zodiac and the ebony ball indicating the courses of the sun and the moon, the face from which poured out water drawn from the river, the Hercules, ending in a stone casing, and supporting the whole of this decoration, and the hollow statue serving for a vane, like the statue of Fortune on the Dogana at Venice, and the Giralda at Seville.

At last the hand reached the figure X; the chimes rang out most delightfully in thin silvery or bronze tones, performing a saraband air; the bell-striker raised

his brazen arm, and the hammer fell upon the gong as many times as there were strokes to strike. This mechanism, due to the ingenuity of the Fleming Lintlaer, greatly tickled Sigognac, who, although naturally very clever, was also very green in many respects, having never before travelled out of his little castle on the moors.

"Now," said Herod, "let us turn the other way. The view is not so fine in that direction, for it is bounded too closely by the houses on the Pont au Change. The buildings on the Mégisserie quay are not worth looking at, but, on the other hand, the tower of Saint-Jacques, the steeple of Saint-Méderic and those distant spires are characteristic of a great city. Then, on the Palace Island, on the quay bordering the main stream, the houses of red brick and courses of white stone and of uniform design have quite a monumental look, which is carried out by the old Clock Tower, with its pepper-pot roof, that often shows up very seasonably through the lower stratum of mist. The Place Dauphine itself, triangular in form and opening out opposite the King's statue, while it allows a view of the gate of the palace of Justice, may well be reckoned one of the finest and best designed known.

The spire of the Sainte-Chapelle, the two-storied church, so famous for its treasury and its relics, tops gracefully the slate roofs of the houses of the square. You note that these roofs are high, slated, and pierced with ornamented dormer windows, that have a very new look, and no wonder, since the Place has but recently been finished. Indeed, in my childhood I played at hop-scotch on the very ground on which these houses now stand. Thanks to the liberality of our kings, Paris is being more and more embellished, to the great admiration of strangers and foreigners who, on their return home, bring wonderful accounts of the city, which they find improved, enlarged, and almost renovated at each successive visit."

"What amazes me even more than the size, richness, and splendour of the buildings, both private and public," answered Sigognac, "is the infinite number of people who swarm and crowd in the streets, on the squares, and on the bridges, just like ants whose nest has been turned up, and who hasten thither and hither with apparently aimless gestures. It is strange to reflect that every one of the individuals who compose this countless multitude has a room, a bed, good or bad, and food almost every day, else he would starve

to death. What a prodigious quantity of victuals, what numberless herds of oxen, how many barrels of flour and puncheons of wine it must take to feed all the people collected here, while on our moors you may go miles without seeing a single human creature."

And truly the crowd moving along the Pont-Neuf was well calculated to astonish a stranger. The centre of the highway was filled with coaches, following or meeting one another, some drawn by two, some by four horses; some newly painted and gilded, lined with velvet, with glass windows and easy springs, a troop of lackeys hanging on behind, and driven by coachmen with rubicund faces, who found it difficult to restrain their spirited horses in the crowd; others less fine, with tarnished paint, leather curtains, poor springs, and drawn by much quieter steeds which had to be touched up with the lash every now and then, the whole turn-out betokening a less wealthy owner. In the former, one could see through the windows richly attired courtiers and ladies coquettishly dressed; in the latter, magistrates or lawyers, physicians or other serious-minded people. Mixed up with these carriages were carts laden with stone, wood, or barrels, and driven by rough carters, who at every block took God's name very

much in vain. Through this maze of vehicles, horsemen strove to make their way, and did not always succeed in avoiding being scraped and mud-bespattered by the wheels. The sedan chairs, both public and private, endeavoured to keep on the edges of the current in order not to be swept away into it, and hugged the parapet of the bridge as closely as they could. A herd of oxen happened to come along, and the confusion at once became indescribable; the horned cattle, bewildered, chased by dogs, beaten by the drivers, bolted in every direction with heads down. The horses, frightened by them, plunged and reared; the pedestrians took to their heels lest they should be gored, and the dogs, slipping between the legs of the less agile, tumbled them over in the mud. One lady, even, powdered and patched, gorgeously attired in flame-coloured ribbons and jet embroideries, who looked like a priestess of Venus seeking whom she might devour, stumbled on her tall pattens and fell flat on her back, — without hurting herself, however. Then again a company of troops would come along, on its way to some post, drums beating and flags flying, and the crowd had perforce to make way for the sons of Mars, who are not accustomed to brook any resistance.

"There is nothing out of the way in all this," said Herod to Sigognac. "Let us push through the press, if we can, and get to the place where the real curiosities of the Pont-Neuf do congregate; there are among them some most quaint and extraordinary characters, whom it will be interesting to observe closer. Nowhere else will you find such a nondescript lot; they seem to spring up out of the Paris pavements like flowers, or rather like misshapen, abnormal mushrooms that flourish nowhere save in the black mud of this city. We are in luck! Here is Périgourdin du Maillet, called the gutter poet, who pays his court to the bronze king. Some maintain that he is a monkey that has escaped from a menagerie; others, that he is one of the camels the Duke de Nevers brought home. The question has never yet been settled; for my own part, I take him to be a man, because of his craziness, his arrogance, and his dirty habits. Monkeys hunt out the vermin that afflicts them and destroy it in a spirit of vengeance and by way of reprisals, but he takes no such pains. Camels smooth their coats and dust themselves all over with the sand as with powdered iris-root; besides they have a number of stomachs, and digest their food, a thing this fellow could not do, for he is

always as empty-stomached as empty-headed. Throw him an alms ; he will take it with a curse and a grumble. That shows conclusively that he is a man, for he is at once crazy, dirty, and ungrateful."

Sigognac drew a piece of silver from his purse and held it out to the poet, who, being sunk in a deep reverie after the manner of his crack-brained and uncertain-tempered tribe, did not at first perceive the Baron standing before him. When he at last emerged from his empty meditation and caught sight of Sigognac, he clutched at the coin with the quick gesture of a madman, and stowed it away in his pocket, grumbling out some bad language. Then, the demon of riming seizing upon him once more, he began to mumble, to roll his eyes, to make grimaces fully as queer as the faces on the heads carved by Germain Pilon under the cornice of the Pont-Neuf, and to beat time with his feet to the lines he muttered between his teeth, so that he looked like a morra player and furnished no end of entertainment to the small boys collected in a ring around him.

The man was dressed in a fashion more outlandish even than the figure of Shrove Tuesday, when it is borne along to the burning on Ash Wednesday, or

than the scarecrows set up in vineyards and orchards to drive away birds. One could have sworn, on seeing him, that he was the bell-striker on the Samaritaine, the Moorish dwarf of the New Market, or the man in armour of Saint Paul's that had rigged itself out in a second-hand-clothes shop. He wore an old rusty beaver, faded by the sunshine and washed out by the rain, bound round with a greasy cord, and adorned, by way of a plume, with a moth-eaten cock's-feather. This hat, which resembled an apothecary's filter more than a human head-dress, came down over his eyebrows, compelling him to throw his head back in order to see, the eyes being practically hidden by the limp and filthy brim. His doublet, of absolutely indescribable stuff and shade, seemed to be better tempered than its wearer, for it grinned at every seam. This comical vestment was bursting with jollity, and with old age also, seeing that it had lived through more years than Methuselah himself. For belt and baldric he had a strip of frieze selvage, from which, instead of a sword, hung a foil, with the button broken off, which scored the ground behind him like a ploughshare. Yellow satin breeches, once worn by some masquerader in a ballet were tucked into a pair of odd boots, one of

which was an oyster fisherman's, of black leather, and the other a white Russia-leather jack-boot; the one flat footed, the other crooked and armed with a spur. The sole of this particular one would long since have parted company with the upper, had it not been fastened with many turns of a piece of string like the fastenings of a cothurn of antiquity. A cloak of coarse red camlet, worn indifferently at all seasons of the year, completed a costume which would have made a Perche apple-gatherer blush with shame, but of which the poet appeared to be proud exceedingly. From under the folds of the cloak, by the pommel of the foil, on which he apparently relied as a defensive weapon, showed a crust of bread.

Farther along, in one of the semicircular recesses on the piers, a blind man, accompanied by a fat woman who served him as guide, was yowling disreputable songs or wailing in a comically lugubrious tone, a ballad reciting the life, crimes, and death of a famous criminal. In another place, a charlatan, dressed in red serge, and a pair of forceps in his hand, was prancing around upon a platform ornamented with rows of teeth, canines, incisors, molars, strung on brass wire. He was engaged in haranguing the crowd, declaring

that he could extract without pain (so far as he himself was concerned) the most stubborn and deep-rooted snags with a pistol shot or a twist of his sword point, unless his clients preferred to be operated on in the ordinary way.

"I do not extract teeth," he shouted in a shrill voice, "I pluck them. Come! Let any one among you who has the toothache step right up; I shall cure him in a twinkling!"

A boor, whose swollen cheek showed he was suffering from an ulcerated tooth, marched up and took his seat on the chair, and the charlatan plunged into his mouth his formidable polished steel forceps. The poor devil, instead of clutching the arms of the chair, followed his tooth, which did not want to leave him, and rose a couple of feet in the air, to the intense delight of the crowd. A sharp wrench put an end to his torture, and the quack brandished on high his bloody trophy.

While this grotesque scene was going on, a monkey, tied to the platform by a chain fastened to the leather belt round its waist, mimicked in the most amusing manner the howls, gestures, and contortions of the patient.

This absurd spectacle did not long hold the attention of Herod and Sigognac, who preferred to stop in front of the stalls, set up on the parapet, where gazettes and old books were sold. The Tyrant pointed out to his companion a ragged rascal who had taken up his post on the projecting cornice on the outside of the bridge, with his crutch and his cup beside him, and who from that coin of vantage shoved his dirty hat under the noses of the people who stopped to glance through a book or to watch the flowing river; thus giving them an opportunity of dropping into it a doubloon or a tester, or more if they pleased, for no coin came amiss to him, not even counterfeit, which he managed to pass.

"In my part of the world," said Sigognac, "it is the swallows only that perch on cornices, but here, I see, it is men."

"You do not call that rascal a man, do you?" returned Herod. "It is mighty civil of you, but it is true that a Christian should despise no one. For the matter of that, there are all sorts of people on this bridge, even honest men, since we are here ourselves. And as the proverb says, you cannot pass along it without meeting a monk, a white horse, and a strumpet.

Here you are! Do you see that monk clattering along in a hurry? Depend upon it the white horse is not far off. Surely! there is one. Look! straight in front of you; that nag curveting over there. The woman alone is lacking, and I dare swear we shall not have to look for her long. And I am right, for instead of one courtesan, here come three of the breed, with bare bosoms and rouged up to the eyes, laughing affectedly to show their teeth. The proverb spoke the truth."

Suddenly a row broke out at the other end of the bridge, and the crowd ran in the direction of the noise. It was a number of swashbucklers who had got into a fight on the open space by the statue, where they had more elbow room. They were shouting, "Kill him! kill him!" and pretended to lay on furiously, but their thrusts were all make-believe, their lunges were careful and simulated, like those of combatants on the stage, where, no matter how many are killed or wounded, there is never any one left dead. There were two couples of them fighting, and they appeared to be animated with the liveliest courage, for they brushed aside the swords of their companions who were endeavouring to part them. The feigned quarrel had

been started for the purpose of collecting a crowd, in which the pickpockets and cut-purses might ply their trade undisturbed. So more than one curious individual, who had made his way in with a handsome plush-lined cloak on his back and well-filled pockets, emerged minus the former, and with his money gone without his knowing it. Whereupon the duellists, who had never really quarrelled, being hand in glove with each other, made up and shook hands with a great show of loyalty, declaring that honour was satisfied, no difficult matter in their case, seeing that the honour of such gallows-birds could not have been much damaged.

Sigognac, by Herod's advice, had refrained from approaching too close to the men, so that he could not see them very plainly through the gaps between the heads and shoulders of the spectators. Nevertheless he fancied he recognised the four villains as being the men whose suspicious actions he had watched the night before in the inn on the Place Dauphine, and he imparted his suspicions to Herod. The fellows, however, had already cleared out, and in that crowd it would have been as difficult to find them as a needle in a haystack.

"It is not unlikely," said Herod, "that the row was

got up on purpose to draw you into it, for we are surely being followed up by the Duke de Vallombreuse's emissaries. One of the combatants would certainly have pretended that you were in his way, and before you could have drawn would have pinked you, apparently by accident, with a murderous thrust, and, at need, his fellows would have finished you. The whole business would have been explained away as the result of an unexpected row, for it is impossible to prove premeditation and ambushing in such cases."

"I hate to think that a man of rank can resort to such despicable measures as having his rival put out of the way by ruffians," said Sigognac. "If the Duke is not satisfied with the result of our first meeting, I am ready to cross swords with him again, until the one or the other of us is killed. That is the way such matters are managed between men of honour."

"No doubt," replied Herod. "But the Duke is well aware, mad with pride though he be, that the issue of such a combat would be death to him. He has tried your blade and has felt your point. Believe me, he bears you a devilish grudge in consequence of his defeat, and he will not be particular as to the means he makes use of to get rid of you."

"If he objects to the sword," said Sigognac, "I will fight him on horseback, with pistols; then he will have no reason to shelter himself behind my skill with the sword."

Talking thus, the pair reached the Quai de l'École, where Sigognac was nearly run over by a coach, in spite of his springing quickly aside. Thanks to his being thin, he escaped being crushed against the wall, so closely did the coach bear down upon him, although there was plenty of room on the other side, and the coachman, by pulling his horses a little to one side, could have avoided the pedestrian whom he seemed bent on running down. The windows of the carriage were closed, and the blinds drawn down; had the latter been drawn aside, there would have been seen a splendidly dressed nobleman with his arm in a black taffeta sling. Even the red reflection of the blinds did not conceal his pallor, and his thin black eyebrows contrasted with his white face. His teeth, brighter than pearls, were biting deep into his bleeding lower lip, and his small mustache, pointed with cosmetics, bristled like the whiskers of a tiger scenting its prey. He was unquestionably handsome, but the expression of his features was so cruel that he would have inspired

horror rather than love; just then, at least, when his face was strangely altered by wicked and hateful passions. This sketch, obtained by drawing aside the blind in a carriage driven at top speed, has no doubt enabled my reader to recognise the young Duke de Vallombreuse.

"Another failure," said he to himself, as the horses took him along by the Tuileries to the Conference gate. "Yet I had promised twenty-five louis to that man of mine if he managed to run foul of that damned Sigognac and to crush him against a post as if by accident. My star is paling, and no mistake. That country bumpkin gets the better of me every time: Isabella adores him and detests me; he has thrashed my ruffians and wounded me. But whether he be invulnerable and protected by an amulet or not, die he must and shall, even if it costs me my name and my ducal rank!"

"Huh!" said Herod, breathing hard, "the horses in that coach seem to be like those of Diomedes, which charged men, tore them to pieces and fed on their flesh. I trust you are not wounded? That scoundrelly coachman saw you quite plainly, and I would wager the heaviest receipts we have ever made that he

was trying to run you over, and that for some mysterious reason or vengeance he drove his horses deliberately upon you. I am sure he did. Did you happen to notice if there was a coat of arms upon the door? Being a nobleman, you are versed in the science of heraldry, and familiar with the arms of the principal families."

"I am sure I do not know," replied Sigognac. "I fancy that even a herald at arms would not have observed the metals and colours of a coat of arms just then, let alone its divisions, charges, and augmentations of honour. I was too busy trying to get out of the way of the vehicle to notice whether it bore lions passant, guardant, or issuant, alerions or martlets, besants or torteaux, crosses urdées or dancettées, or other emblems."

"That is a pity," returned Herod, "for if you had it would have given us a clue and perhaps enabled us to get at the bottom of this dark intrigue, for it is plain that some one is trying to get rid of you by hook or by crook; *quibuscumque viis*, as our friend Blazius the Pedant would not fail to remark in that Latin of his. Now, although we have no proof of the fact, I should not feel in the least surprised to learn that the coach is

owned by the Duke de Vallombreuse, who proposed to give himself the pleasure of driving over his adversary's body."

"You ought to be ashamed to think such a thing, Herod," said Sigognac. "That would be a deed most foul, infamous, and abominable, and wholly unworthy of one belonging to a great house, as is the case, after all, with Vallombreuse. Besides, remember that we left him badly wounded in his residence at Poictiers. How, then, could he be now in Paris, which we entered but yesterday?"

"Did we not stay long enough in Tours and Orleans, where we gave several performances, to enable him, with the means at his command, to follow us up and even to outstrip us? As for his wound, considering he was attended by the very first physicians, it must long since have closed up and healed, especially as it was not severe enough to prevent a young and vigorous fellow from travelling comfortably in a coach or a litter. You had best, therefore, Captain, keep a bright look-out, for there is no doubt that some deadly trick is to be played upon you or that you are to be drawn into an ambush under the guise of an accident. Your death would leave Isabella defenceless in

the hands of the Duke, for what could we poor strollers do against so powerful a nobleman? It is possible that Vallombreuse is not himself in Paris, but it is certain that his tools are, since you yourself, had you not, urged by well-founded suspicions, watched last night sword in hand, would have been neatly despatched in your own room."

Herod's arguments were too plausible to be easily refuted; the Baron merely nodded in assent, and put his hand to his sword, which he half drew from the scabbard, to make sure it worked easily and ran no risk of sticking fast in its sheath.

During this conversation the two men had proceeded along the Louvre and the Tuileries as far as the Conference gate, which led to the Cours-la-Reine. There they saw coming in their direction a great cloud of dust, through which flashed the gleam of swords and breastplates. They drew aside to allow the cavalry to pass by; it was escorting the King's coach, His Majesty being on his way back from Saint Germain to the Louvre. The windows of the carriage being open and the blinds drawn up, in order, no doubt, that the people might gaze their fill upon the monarch who was the arbiter of their destinies, they were able to see a pale phantom,

dressed in black, with the blue ribbon on his breast, motionless as if made of wax. Long brown hair framed in a face devoid of any expression save that of intense weariness, a Spanish weariness, a weariness like that of Philip II, and such as the Escorial alone, with its silence and solitude, can produce. The eyes did not seem to reflect what they gazed upon; there was no glow of desire, thought, or will in them. Deep distaste of life had caused the lower lip to relax, and it hung morosely in sullen fashion. The thin white hands rested on the knees like those of Egyptian idols; yet there was an air of regal majesty about that gloomy figure which personified France, and in whose veins ran thicker and duller the generous blood of Henry IV.

The coach went by like a flash, followed by a troop of cavalry forming the remainder of the escort. The sight made Sigognac thoughtful. In his simplicity, he had imagined the King to be a sort of supernatural being, powerful and radiant in a blaze of gold and gems, proud, splendid, of triumphant mien, handsomer, taller, stronger than all other men; and now he had seen a sad, poor, weary, suffering figure, almost mean, in a dress as sombre as a mourning habit, apparently

unconscious of the outer world and plunged in a gloomy reverie.

"Can it be," said he to himself, "that that was the King? — the man who stands for so many millions of men; who is at the top of the pyramid; towards whom so many hands are outstretched in supplication from below; who makes the cannons belch forth death or be mute as he wills; who raises men up or strikes them down; who deals out punishment and recompense; who can pardon even when the law has ordered death, and with a single word can change the course of a life? Were his glance to fall upon me, I should be rich instead of penniless, powerful instead of helpless; I should become a new man, to whom all should bow and whom all would court. The ruinous towers of Sigognac would rise restored prouder than ever, and new domains would be added to my narrow patrimony. I should be the lord of vale and hill! But what probability is there that he will ever notice me in the human swarm that stirs around his feet and that he does not even glance at? And even if he did note me, what can there be between him and me?"

These reflections, and many others which it would take too long to relate, filled Sigognac's mind as he

walked in silence by the companion's side. Herod respected his preoccupation, and amused himself watching the coming and going of the carriages. Then he drew the Baron's attention to the fact that it was close on the hour of noon, and time to turn the needle of the compass towards the pole star of soup, seeing there is one thing only which is worse than a dinner that has grown cold, and that is a warmed-up meal.

Sigognac yielded to this unanswerable reason, and they retraced their steps to the inn. Nothing worthy of note had happened during their absence; a couple of hours, merely, had gone by. Isabella, quietly seated at table in front of a plate of soup, received her friend with her usual sweet smile and held out her fair hand to him. The players asked him chaffing or eager questions about his excursion through the streets, inquiring whether he still owned a cloak, a pocket handkerchief, and a purse, which Sigognac laughingly answered in the affirmative. The bright chatter soon made him forget his sombre preoccupation, and he ended by asking himself if he were not the dupe of his hypochondriacal imagination that insisted on seeing an ambush in everything that happened to him.

He was right, all the same, in his suspicions, for his

enemies, in spite of the failure of their previous attempts, had not given up their evil purpose. Mérindol, whom the Duke threatened to send back to the galleys whence he had taken him, if he did not make away with Sigognac, had made up his mind to call in the aid of a bravo friend of his, who stuck at nothing, however great the risk, so long as he was well paid. Mérindol felt himself unable, single-handed, to get the better of the Baron, especially as the latter now knew him and, being on his guard, was more difficult to get at.

He therefore started off in search of the ruffian, who dwelt on the Place du Marché-Neuf, near the Petit-Pont, — a quarter inhabited chiefly by bravoes, pick-pockets, cut-purses and other evil livers of the same sort.

Among the high, grimy houses, that leaned against each other like drunkards afraid of tumbling down, there was one dirtier, more ruinous, and more leprous even than its neighbours, the windows of which, overflowing with loathsome rags, resembled ripped up corpses from which the entrails were flowing. Mérindol entered a dark passage that led into this cavern, but soon the daylight failed him and, feeling with his hands the walls that were slimy and sticky as if slugs

had crawled over them, groped for and found in the obscurity the rope that served for a balustrade, and which might have been taken from a gibbet and greased with human fat, so slippery was it. He pulled himself up as well as he could by this sort of Jacob's-ladder, stumbling over the humps and callosities formed by the filth that had accumulated on the steps layer by layer since the days when Paris was still Lutetia.

As he ascended, however, the darkness became less intense. A wan, dim light filtered through the openings intended to admit light to the stairs, and which looked out into a yard as black and deep as the mouth of a mine. At last he reached the topmost story, half suffocated by the mephitic vapours that rose from the leads. Two or three doors opened upon the landing, the dirty plastered ceiling of which was ornamented with obscene arabesques, curled lines, and words fouler than any in Rabelais, done with the smoke of candles, fit frescoes for such a den.

One of the doors stood ajar; Mérindol kicked it open, objecting to touching it with his hand, and entered without further ceremony into the room that was the Louvre of Jacquemin Lampourde, bravo.

Acrid smoke made his throat and eyes smart so

badly that it was quite two minutes ere he could speak, coughing the while like a cat that has swallowed the feathers of the bird it is busy devouring. The smoke, profiting by the fact that the door stood open, spread out upon the landing-place, and the mist of it in the room becoming less thick, the visitor was able to make out the looks of the interior.

The den deserves to be described in detail, for it is not likely that my worthy readers have ever penetrated into such a place, and they cannot have the least idea of its utter shabbiness.

The furniture was mainly composed of the four walls, upon which the rainwater, leaking through the roof, had drawn virgin islands and streams not to be met with upon any geographical map. On the places that were within reach of the hand, the successive tenants of the hovel had amused themselves cutting in with their knives their incongruous, queer, or hideous names, urged thereto by the desire which impels even the most obscure to leave behind them some trace of their passage upon earth. These names were often accompanied by that of some woman, a street Iris, and surmounted by a heart pierced with an arrow that looked like a fish-bone.

Some of the more artistic tenants had attempted, by means of a coal taken from the fire, to draw some grotesque sketch, a face with a pipe or a criminal jigging about at the end of a rope, with his tongue stuck out.

On the shelf of the mantelpiece, under which smoked and sizzled branches from a stolen faggot, there was a medley of odds and ends, covered with dust: a bottle with a candle stuck in the neck of it; the candle itself half burned down, and the tallow run down in great masses upon the glass, an appropriate torch for a prodigal and drunkard; a backgammon dice-box; three loaded dice; Robert de Bernière's "Hours" for the use of lansquenet players; a bundle of old pipes; a stone tobacco jar; a sock containing a toothless comb; a dark lantern, the lens of which looked like the eye of a night-bird; bunches of keys, no doubt false, for there was not in the room a single piece of furniture that locked; a pair of curling-irons for the mustaches; a broken bit of mirror, the silvering of which was scratched as if the devil had sharpened his claws upon it, and in which but one eye at a time could be seen and even then it would not have done for the eye to be like Juno's, whom Homer called "ox-

eyed" — and numberless other trifles which it is needless to describe.

Opposite the fireplace, on a portion of the wall less damp than the rest, and furthermore hung with a piece of green serge, blazed a trophy of swords most carefully kept polished, of proved temper, and bearing on their steel blades the trade-marks of the most famous Spanish and Italian sword-makers. There were two-edged swords, triangular blades, blades grooved down the length to allow the blood to run off, daggers with large shell-hilts, cutlasses, poniards, stilettoes, and other priceless weapons, the value of which contrasted strangely with the poverty of the place. There was not a spot of rust, not a speck of dust upon them, for they were the killer's tools, and in no princely arsenal could they have been more cared for, oftener rubbed with oil, polished with wool and preserved in their pristine excellence. They looked as if they had just come from the shop, for Lampourde, neglectful of everything else, took the greatest pride in keeping them furbished up. And when one reflected upon the nature of the man's trade, such scrupulous care struck one as horrible and the weapons themselves seemed to reflect blood from their shining blades.

Seats there were none, and every man was free to stand and grow up, unless he preferred, for the sake of saving the soles of his boots, to sit down upon an old basket with the bottom knocked out, a trunk, or the lute case that lay in a corner.

The table consisted of a shutter placed upon trestles, and also answered the purpose of a bed. After one of his carouses, the master of the place was wont to stretch out upon it, and pulling over himself the table-cloth, which was simply the lining of his cloak, the outer part of which he had sold in order to warm his stomach, he would turn over towards the wall, to avoid seeing the empty bottles, which constitute a most doleful spectacle for drunkards.

It was in that attitude that Mérindol discovered Jacquemin Lampourde, who was snoring fit to wake the dead, although every clock in the neighbourhood had struck the hour of four in the afternoon.

A huge venison pasty, the golden remains of which showed a tracery of pistachio, lay cut open on the floor, and more than half devoured, like a body torn by wolves in a wood. It was surrounded by a fabulous array of flagons the very soul of which had been drained, and that were now but mere figures of bot-

tles, empty vessels fit only to be made into broken glass.

A fellow, whom Mérindol had not at first noticed, was sound asleep under the table, still holding between his teeth the broken stem of a pipe, the bowl of which had rolled on the floor, filled with tobacco that the fellow had been too drunk to light.

"Hallo! Lampourde; wake up! You have slept long enough! And do not look at me with eyes as round as saucers; I am no commissary or sergeant of police come to fetch you to the Châtelet prison. There is important business on hand; try to collect your fuddled senses and to listen to me."

The individual thus summoned rose slowly and sleepily, sat up, stretched out his long arms that reached nearly to the walls on either side, opened a huge mouth filled with sharp fangs, and yawned mightily, like a weary lion, uttering at the same time a number of inarticulate guttural sounds.

Jacquemin Lampourde was no Adonis, although he claimed to be something of a lady-killer and boasted of conquests even among the highest in the land. His great height, of which he was very proud, his thin stork-like legs, his narrow shoulders, his bony chest,

reddened by drink, that showed through his half-opened shirt, his simian arms, so long that he could fasten his garters almost without bending, did not combine in a pleasant make-up, while as to his face, the chief feature in it was a monstrously big nose, which recalled that of Cyrano de Bergerac, the cause of so many duels. But Lampourde found consolation for the size of his proboscis in the popular saying, "A face is never spoiled by a big nose." His eyes, though still dulled by drink and sleep, had a steel-cold flash that spoke of courage and decision. Down his thin cheeks two or three perpendicular wrinkles, like sword-cuts, drew rigid furrows that were not precisely dimples. A very unkempt shock of black hair fuzzed around his face, which would have answered admirably for the carving on a fiddle-head, and yet nobody felt like making sport of him, so peculiarly alarming, sly, and fierce was his expression.

"The devil take the fool who breaks in on my enjoyment in this way, and comes floundering through my anacreontic dreams. There! I was happy, for the loveliest princess on earth was receiving me graciously, and you dispel my dream."

"A truce to your nonsense," said Mérindol impatiently. "Listen to me for two minutes."

"I never listen to anybody when I am drunk," majestically replied Lampourde, leaning on his elbow. "Besides, I am in funds; I have oceans of money. Last night we robbed an English nobleman who had his pockets full of pistoles, and I am hard at work eating and drinking up my share of them. There won't be many left after I have had a little game of lansquenet, however. So no business before night. Be at midnight on the platform on the Pont-Neuf, at the foot of the bronze horse. I shall be there, blooming, clear-headed, and alert, with every faculty in good shape. We can tune up then and agree on the amount to be paid; it will have to be pretty large, for you understand that you cannot call upon a gentleman of my kidney to undertake second-rate rascalities, insignificant robberies, or suchlike peccadilloes. I have got sick of stealing; I only do murder now; it is better form. A man then is a carnivorous animal, not a mere beast of prey. If it is a question of killing, I am your man; but only on condition that the fellow is to defend himself. A little opposition heartens a man up for his work."

"You need feel no anxiety on that score," answered Mérindol, with a nasty grin. "You will find your match."

"All the better," cried Lampourde. "It is ages since I have crossed swords with any one fit to face me. But enough for the present. Good-night to you, and let me sleep."

When Mérindol was gone Jacquemin Lampourde tried to fall asleep again, but in vain, for broken slumber cannot be mended. The bravo rose, roughly shook the fellow asleep under the table, and the pair trudged off to a low pot-house where lansquenet and bassett were played. The company consisted of troopers, swashbucklers, thieves, lackeys, clerks, and townsmen brought there by girls, poor pigeons destined to be plucked alive. The only sound heard was the rattling of dice in boxes and the shuffling of cards, for gamesters are a silent race, and it is only when they lose that they allow a few curses to escape them. After alternations of good and bad luck, a vacuum, abhorred alike by nature and by man, was made in Lampourde's pocket. He proposed to play on credit, but that sort of currency was not accepted in that place, where the gamblers on being paid were in the habit of biting the coins to test their genuineness, lest the louis should prove to be gilded lead and the testers to be made of tin. So out he had to go without a doit to his name, after

having made his entry into the place like a rich lord and rattling pistoles in his pockets.

"Ouf!" said he, when the cool night air struck him and steadied him. "Now am I cleaned out. Strange, money makes me drunk and stupid, and I see now why financiers are such fools. Being penniless, I am brilliant again; my brain fairly seethes with ideas. No longer Laridon, I am again Cæsar. Hallo! the bell-striker on the Samaritaine is hammering out midnight: Mérindol must be waiting for me in front of the bronze horse."

Whereupon he took his way to the Pont-Neuf.

Mérindol was at his post, watching his own shadow in the moonlight. The two bravoes, having first looked carefully around them to see if any one could hear them, whispered together for a long time. What they said to each other, I know not, but when Lampourde took leave of the Duke de Vallombreuse's agent, he was making gold chink in his pockets with an impudence that showed how dreaded he was on the Pont-Neuf.

XII

THE CROWN AND RADISH

JACQUEMIN LAMPOURDE was much exercised in his mind after leaving Mérindol, and on reaching the end of the Pont-Neuf, he stopped and remained for some time in great perplexity. Two opposing attractions tempted him sorely. On the one hand, the faint chink of gold sounding in his ear, lansquenet drew him with almost irresistible force. On the other, the clatter of glasses making itself heard, the wine-shop presented itself to him in no less seductive guise. An embarrassing dilemma with a vengeance! And although theologians declare free will to be man's noblest prerogative, the fact remains that Lampourde, a prey to two conflicting and equal attractions, — for he was as fierce a gamester as he was a steadfast toper, — did not know which way to turn. He started for the gambling-house, but forthwith the pot-bellied wine bottles, covered with dust and cobwebs, and topped with their capsules of sealing-wax, struck his imagina-

tion so dazzlingly that he started back for the wine-house. Then gambling shook at his ear a box filled with loaded dice, and evoked before him a semicircle of marked cards, diapered like a peacock's tail; and that enchanting vision nailed him to the spot.

"Come!" said the swashbuckler to himself, annoyed at his own indecision, "am I going to stay here stuck like an idol? I must look like a perfect ninny gaping at nothing, with that stupid and undecided face of mine. Happy thought! Suppose I were to cut both the card-table and the bottle, and go pay a visit to my goddess, my Iris, the incomparable beauty who holds my heart in thrall? But then she may be at some ball or nocturnal entertainment, at this hour, and not at home. Besides, voluptuousness is destructive of courage, and the greatest captains have had cause to regret being too fond of the ladies. There was Hercules and his Dejanira, for instance, Samson with his Delilah, and Mark Antony with his Cleopatra, and many more whose names I cannot remember, for it is many a long day since I was at school. Well, then, I give up the lascivious and objectionable fancy that occurred to me. But what am I to do about these

two charmers? If I choose the one I run the risk of regretting the other."

While evolving this monologue, Jacquemin Lampourde, his hands shoved well down into his pockets, his chin pressed down upon his ruff in such a way that it made his chin tuft curl up, seemed to be taking root in the pavement and turning into a statue, as happened to more than one individual told of in Ovid's "Metamorphoses." Suddenly he gave such a start that a belated townsman, who happened to be passing by, took fright and quickened his steps, believing the man was going to assault him or, at the very least, steal his cloak from him. But Lampourde had no idea of robbing the fool, of whose presence he was not even aware, so deep was his abstraction. A brilliant thought had just occurred to him and had put an end to all his uncertainty.

He quickly drew a doubloon from his pocket, spun it in the air, after having said, "Tails, wine-shop; heads, gambling hell."

The coin spun well, and then, brought back to earth by its weight, fell upon a paving-stone, glittering golden, as it did so, in the silver rays of the moon that shone unclouded at the moment. The ruffian knelt

down to read the oracle spoken by chance; the coin had replied to the question put, and Bacchus had won the day over Fortune.

"All right, I 'll get drunk," said Lampourde, popping the doubloon, after having wiped off the mud, into his huge purse, which was deep as the abyss, being intended to contain many things.

Striding along, he walked in the direction of the Crown and Radish tavern, the sanctuary where he was accustomed to pour out libations to the god of wine. The advantage of the Crown and Radish, so far as Lampourde was concerned, lay in its being close to his lodging, which he could make with a few zig-zags after he had filled himself full of wine from his throat to the sole of his feet.

It was the foulest hole imaginable. Squat pillars, plastered over with a sanguineous and vinous red, supported the enormous beam that served as a frieze, the rough spots in which indicated remains of old carvings half effaced by time. On looking very carefully there might be made out a scroll-work of vine stems and leaves, through which monkeys catching hold of foxes by the tail were skylarking. On the keystone of the door was carved a huge radish, with

green leaves, painted in natural colours, and topped by a golden crown, the whole thing much faded, and having for many generations of topers served as the sign of, and given its name to, the tavern.

The bays formed by the spaces between the pillars were closed just then by shutters heavily protected with iron, and fit to stand a siege. They were not so closely fastened, however, but that there filtered through rays of reddish light and the low murmur of songs and quarrels. The light, streaming over the muddy pavement, produced a quaint effect, of which Lampourde failed to note the picturesqueness, though it made him aware that there was still a numerous company in the Crown and Radish.

Smiting the door with the pommel of his sword, the bravo, by the peculiar rhythm of the blows he struck, was recognised as an habitué of the place, and the door was partially opened to allow him to enter.

The room where the topers sat looked like a cavern. It was low-ceiled, and the main beam, having sunk under the weight of the upper stories, seemed ready to break, though it was strong enough to support a belfry; resembling in this respect the Leaning Tower at Pisa or the Asinelli Tower at Bologna, both of which keep

on leaning over and never falling. The smoke of the pipes and the candles had turned the ceiling as black as the inside of chimneys used to smoke herring, bottargo, and hams. The walls had once been painted red, with a border of vine stems and tendrils, by some Italian painter who had come to France in the train of Catherine de' Medici. The painting on the upper part of the walls was fairly preserved, although much darkened, and now resembling smears of dried blood rather than the brilliant scarlet tint it must have exhibited in its first bloom. Damp, the rubbing of backs, and the dirt from the heads of the customers who were in the habit of leaning against it, had spoiled and destroyed the whole of the lower portion, and the plaster showed filthy, scraped, and bare. Of yore, the tavern had been frequented by a better class of customers, but little by little, as manners improved, the officers and courtesans were followed by gamblers, sharpers, cut-purses, cut-throats, in a word, a clientèle of dangerous scoundrels who had made their mark on the place and had transformed it into a sinister den.

A wooden staircase led to a gallery on which opened the doors of rooms so low that they could only be entered by drawing in one's horns and head like a snail.

This staircase took up the wall opposite the entrance, and under it, in the shadow, were arranged, with a symmetry more pleasing to drunkards than any other sort of decoration, a number of casks of wine, some full, some tapped. In the wide chimney-place blazed faggots of brushwood, the burning ends of which projected on to the floor, though, as the latter was made of old bricks, there was no reason to fear trouble. The reflection of the fire lighted up the tinned top of the counter opposite, where stood the tavern-keeper behind a rampart of pots, pints, bottles, and jugs. The brilliant light, deadening the yellow gleam of the candles that flared in the smoke, cast upon the walls the caricature shadows of the customers, in the shape of extravagant noses, shoe-like chins, great toupees, and other deformations as strange as those in Master Alcofribas Nazier's "Comical Dreams." The rows of black silhouettes, swarming and moving behind the real beings, seemed to mock these and to cleverly parody them. The regular customers of the establishment, seated upon benches, leaned upon tables the wood of which, scored with knives, covered with names cut in, tattooed with burns, was greasy with spilt sauce and stained with wine. The sleeves, however, that wiped across it could

not suffer damage from the filth, and some, indeed, being out at elbows, it was only the flesh of the arm that ran any risk. Kept awake by the noise in the place, two or three hens, feathered sufferers that ought to have been roosting by this time, had made their way into the room and were busy picking up, from between the feet and legs of the topers, the crumbs that fell from the tables.

When Jacquemin Lampourde entered the Crown and Radish, a most tremendous row was going on in the establishment. Ferocious-looking fellows, holding out their empty cups to be refilled, smote the tables with blows fit to kill an ox, that made the tallow dips nearly jump out of the tin holders. Others were shouting, "Drink hearty, and no heel-taps!" as they pledged each other in flowing bumpers. Others, again, accompanied a drinking-song, howled in chorus with voices as much out of tune as those of dogs baying at the moon, by striking their glasses with their knives and rubbing two plates together. Some teased the servant wenches who, engaged in carrying high above the crowd dishes of smoking viands, were unable to protect themselves against these amorous demonstrations, being, besides, more anxious for the safety of the

dishes than that of their own virtue. And some were smoking long Dutch pipes, amusing themselves blowing the smoke through their nostrils.

The crowd was not composed of men only, the fair sex being represented there by some pretty ugly specimens, for vice does at times allow itself to be as plain as virtue. These Phyllises, to whom the first-comer, provided he could furnish the requisite coin, might play the part of Tircis or Tityrus, walked about in couples, stopping by the tables and drinking like pet doves from every one's glass. These frequent libations, added to the heat of the room, made their cheeks crimson under the brick-red of the rouge they had laid on thickly, so that they looked like idols with two coats of paint. Their hair, genuine or false, was frizzed into love-locks plastered upon their foreheads that were shiny with cosmetics, or else, curled with a hot iron, fell in long ringlets upon their freely displayed powdered bosoms, a little azure vein showing here and there through the coating of powder. In their dress they affected a coquettish and mincing bravery. They were decked out in ribbons, feathers, embroideries, galoons, drops, aiguillettes, and bright colours; but it was easy to see that all this luxury, intended for show, was anything

but real, and came from the second-hand shops. The pearls were glass, the jewellery brass, the silk skirts old dresses made over and dyed; but this counterfeit elegance sufficed to dazzle the eyes of the drunkards collected in the den. As for scent, these ladies assuredly did not smell like roses, but stank of musk like polecats, as that was the only scent strong enough to overcome the foul odours in the pot-house, in comparison with which it was sweeter than balm, ambrosia, and benjoin.

Lampourde, long since used to the manners in this establishment, which, for the matter of that, seemed to him quite proper, paid not the least attention to the scene I have just described. Seated in front of a table, his back against the wall, he was gazing lovingly and amorously upon a bottle of Canary wine which a servant had just brought him, — an old and proper bottle, drawn from the select stock reserved for the thorough-paced swillers and drunkards. Although the ruffian had come in alone, two glasses had been placed on the table, his horror of solitary drinking being well-known, and a boon companion being sure to turn up to keep him company. Until this chance fellow-guest should make his appearance, Lampourde occupied himself

with slowly raising to his eyes the slender-stalked glass, in the shape of a bindweed flower, in which sparkled, spangled with a touch of light, the generous golden liquor. Then, having satisfied the sense of sight with the contemplation of the warm burned-topaz colour, he proceeded to satisfy the sense of smell, and imparting to the wine a sort of rotary movement, he breathed in its bouquet with nostrils expanded wide as those of a heraldic dolphin. There remained now but the sense of taste. The papillæ on the palate, having been duly excited, were impregnated with a mouthful of the nectar, which the tongue drove round about the interior of the mouth and at last sent on to the throat with an appreciative smack of the lips. Thus Master Jacquemin Lampourde, with a single glass of wine, delighted three of man's senses, proving thereby that he was a consummate epicurean who knew how to extract the very last drop and quintessence of pleasure from things. Indeed, he was wont to claim that the senses of touch and hearing were also gratified; the former by the shape and smoothness of the clean-cut glass; the latter, by the music, vibration, and perfect harmony that result from the clinking of it with the blade of a knife or the passing of the wetted finger

round its rim. But these are paradoxes, imaginations, and fancies of over subtile refinement, that, because they seek to prove too much, prove nothing but the mistaken ratiocination of the old scoundrel.

The swashbuckler had been thus occupied for some moments when the door of the tavern opened, and an individual entered the establishment. This latest comer was clothed in black from head to foot, the only white about him being his cravat and a mass of linen that puffed out over his stomach between his doublet and his trunks. Remains of bugle quilling endeavoured, but unsuccessfully, to adorn his seedy costume, the cut of which, nevertheless, betrayed traces of former elegance.

The peculiarity of this fellow was that his face was white as if it had been powdered over with flour, while his nose was red as a glowing coal. It was veined with little purple lines that vouched for the assiduity of his worship of the goddess Bottle. The imagination was appalled at the thought of the number of tuns of wine and flasks of brandy that had been necessary to bring that nose to such an intensity of erubescence. His extraordinary visage resembled a cheese with a cherry stuck in it, and nothing would

have been needed to complete the resemblance but two apple seeds in the place of the eyes, and a slit for the wide, thin-lipped mouth. Such was Malartic, the bosom friend, the Pylades, the Euryales, the *fidus Achates* of Jacquemin Lampourde. He was unquestionably not a handsome man, but his moral qualities fully made up for his slight physical deficiencies. Next to Jacquemin, for whom he professed the greatest admiration, he was the most skilful swordsman in Paris; at cards, he turned up the king with a regularity that no one ventured to remark on; he drank straight on end without ever apparently getting tipsy, and although he was not known to patronize any tailor, he had always a larger stock of cloaks than the best fitted-out courtier. In his own way he was quite a scrupulous man, a conscientious blackguard, capable of giving his life in fighting for a comrade, and of bearing up, without uttering a sound, under the torture of the strapado, the boot, the rack, and even, most horrible for a toper like him, the water, rather than involve his fellows by a single indiscreet word. He was, in short, a very fine chap in his way, and deservedly enjoyed the esteem of every one in the circles in which he plied his trade.

Malartic walked straight to Lampourde's table,

pulled up a stool, sat down opposite his friend, silently clutched the full glass that appeared to have been poured out ready for him, and swallowed the contents at a draught. He drank in a different way from Jacquemin, but quite as efficaciously, as was proved by the cardinal purple of his nose. At the end of a sitting the two friends had an equal number of bottles chalked up against them on the tavern-keeper's slate, and kindly Father Bacchus, astride on his barrel, smiled impartially upon them as upon two devotees who, if they did follow different rituals, were at least equally fervent. The one galloped through his mass, the other spun it out, but in either case, mass was said, without fail.

Lampourde, who was familiar with his friend's habits, filled up his glass several times running; this performance involved sending for a second bottle, soon drained like the first, and followed by a third that lasted longer and gave out more reluctantly. Then, by way of taking breath, the pair of ruffians called for pipes, and set about sending up to the ceiling, through the pall of smoke above their heads, great rings like those children draw at the top of the chimneys of the houses they scribble on their text-books and their

copy-books. After they had inhaled and exhaled a certain number of puffs, they disappeared, like the gods of Homer and Vergil, in a cloud from out of which Malartic's nose alone glowed like a red meteor.

Shrouded in the vapour, the two companions entered upon a conversation which it would have been bad for them to have the Captain of the watch overhear; fortunately the Crown and Radish, was a safe place, into which never a spy ventured, and where an officer of the law who might have been bold enough to enter, would have been dropped through the cellar trap-door, whence he would have come up in the condition of hashed meat.

"How is business?" asked Lampourde of Malartic in the tone of a dealer inquiring what the price current is. "This is the dead season; the King is staying at Saint Germain, and the court has followed him there. It hurts trade, that sort of thing; for there is no one left in Paris but townsmen and people worth little or nothing."

"Don't mention it," answered Malartic. "It is a perfect shame. Why, the other night I stopped a well-looking fellow on the Pont-Neuf and called upon him for his purse or his life. He chucked me his purse,

that had only three or four silver coins in it, and his cloak, which was of serge with imitation braid. I was defrauded. All you meet in gambling hells now are lackeys, lawyers, clerks, or precocious lads who have stolen a few pistoles from their father's drawers to tempt fortune with. You have n't shuffled twice or cast the dice thrice before they are cleaned out. It is positively indecent to have to display one's talents for such poor results. The Lucindas, Dorimènes, and Cidalises who are usually so kind to fellows of our breed, now refuse to settle notes of hand and promissory notes, even though I thrash them soundly, on the ground that the Court is away and consequently they receive no presents and are not entertained, this compelling them to pawn their things in order to live. But for a jealous old cuckold who has hired me to thrash his wife's lovers, I should not have made enough this month to avoid drinking water, a necessity to which nothing shall drive me; death in my boots being in my opinion a hundred times preferable. I have not had a single order for an ambush, for an abduction, for a murder even. These be dreadful times of a truth! Hatred is dying out, grudges are going to the devil, the feeling of vengeance is vanishing, and people forget insults as readily

as they do kindness. The age is sinking into a humdrum condition, losing its vitality, and manners are becoming disgustingly peaceable."

"Yes, the good old days are over and done with," sighed Jacquemin Lampourde. "Formerly some great lord would have taken us into his service, and we should have helped him in his expeditions and secret jobs; but now a man has to work for the general public. All the same there are a few good things going yet."

And as he spoke, he rattled the gold coins in his pocket. The melodious sound made Malartic's eyes flash, but his glance speedily softened, for his comrade's money was a sacred thing. He merely sighed in a way that meant, "You are a lucky fellow."

"I expect," said Lampourde, "to be in a position ere long to find some work for you; seeing that you are no slouch and waste no time in rolling up your sleeves when it is a question of pinking a man or shooting him down. Being a methodical party, you carry out your orders within the stipulated time, and assume all risks as regards the police. I am surprised that Fortune on her glass globe has not ere now alighted at your gate, though it is true that the vixen, with a woman's char-

acteristic bad taste, showers her favours upon a lot of popinjays and good-for-nothings to the detriment of men of merit. Well, until the goddess takes a fancy to you, let us pass the time in drinking, *papaliter*, even unto the swelling of the cork of our soles."

This philosophical proposal was too unmistakably sound for Jacquemin's comrade to make the least objection to it. The two ruffians refilled their pipes and their glasses, and sprawled on the table in the attitude of people who are settling down comfortably and do not intend to be disturbed.

Nevertheless they were disturbed, for in one corner of the room broke out the sound of voices from a group surrounding two men, who were engaged in settling the terms of a wager, resulting from the inability of the one to believe a fact stated by the other, unless he saw the thing with his own eyes.

The group broke up, and Malartic and Lampourde, whose attention had been excited, saw a man of medium stature, but singularly alert and vigorous, dark as a Spanish Moor, a handkerchief tied round his head, dressed in a maroon coat with hood, beneath which could be seen a buff jerkin and brown breeches adorned with a row of brass buttons in the form of bells, down

the outer seam. A broad red woollen sash was bound round his loins, and he had just drawn from it a Valencia navaja, which, when he had opened it, proved to be as long as a sabre. He pushed up the ring, tried the point with the finger, and appeared to be satisfied with the result, for he said to his opponent, "I am ready."

Then he called out in a guttural tone a strange name, yet unheard by the frequenters of the Crown and Radish, but that has already figured more than once in these pages, — "Chiquita!"

On the call being repeated, a thin, wan-faced girl, asleep in a dark corner, threw off the cape in which she had carefully wrapped herself up, and which made her look like a bundle of rags, drew near Agostino, for it was he, and fixing upon him her great flashing eyes, made brighter by the dark rings around them, said in a rich, deep voice that contrasted with her frail appearance:

"What do you want with me, master? I am ready to do your bidding here as on the moors, for you are brave, and your navaja is scored with many a red line."

Chiquita spoke these words in the Escuara tongue, or Basque dialect, which is as unintelligible to Frenchmen as High German, Hebrew, or Chinese.

Agostino took Chiquita by the hand, and placed her

standing against the door, telling her to remain perfectly quiet. The child, accustomed to the performance, exhibited neither terror nor surprise. She stood still, her arms hanging limp, and looking in front of her with the utmost serenity, while Agostino, at the other end of the room, one foot forward, the other drawn back, was balancing the long knife, the handle of which rested on his fore-arm.

A double line of spectators formed a lane from Agostino to Chiquita, and such of the ruffians as happened to be pot-bellied drew in their corporations and held their breath, for fear of being over the line, while the long-nosed fellows prudently pulled back to avoid having their proboscides sliced off on the fly.

Suddenly Agostino's arm shot out like a spring, the fearful weapon flashed by like lightning and buried itself in the door exactly above Chiquita's head, without cutting off a single hair, but so close to the top of her head that it seemed put there to allow her height to be measured.

As the navaja whistled past, not one of the spectators could help looking down, but the thick eyelashes of the girl had not even moved. The bandit's skill was received with outspoken admiration by the critical

audience; even the adversary who had disbelieved in the possibility of the feat, clapped his hands with enthusiasm.

Agostino pulled out the knife, which was still quivering, returned to his place, and next drove the blade between the arm and the body of the impassible Chiquita. Had the steel swerved but a fraction of an inch, it would have pierced the child's heart. Agostino repeated the feat, taking the other side of the body, although the gallery cried out that that was enough, merely to show that his success was not due to luck.

Chiquita, proud of the applause, which was meant for her courage fully as much as for Agostino's dexterity, cast around her a glance of triumph. Her swelling nostrils drew in the air hard, and her teeth gleamed white and fierce between her parted lips. The gleam of her teeth and the phosphorescent flash of her eyes made three luminous points that illumined her dark face, tanned by the open air. Her unkempt hair curled round her forehead and cheeks in long black ringlets, scarcely held in by a red ribbon which the rebellious locks overflowed and concealed here and there. On her neck, more tawny than Cordova leather, shimmered like drops of milk the pearl neck-

lace given her by Isabella. Her dress was different, though scarcely better. She no longer wore the canary yellow skirt with the embroidered parrot that would have made her look passing strange and peculiar in Paris. Instead she had a short dark-blue skirt, pleated closely on the hips, and a sort of jacket or vest of coarse black camlet, fastened above the bosom with two or three horn buttons. Her feet, accustomed to tread the flowery, scented heather, were shod with shoes much too large for her, the shopman having been unable to find any small enough in his stock. She appeared to be bothered by this piece of luxury, but she had been compelled to concede so much to the cold Paris mud. She was just as shy as at the inn of the Blue Sun, but it was evident that more ideas were penetrating her shyness, and a touch of the maiden was already discernible in the child. She had seen many things since leaving the moors, and her imagination had been dazzled by them.

She returned to her corner, wrapped herself up in her cape, and went to sleep once more. The loser of the wager paid his five pistoles, the amount of the stakes, to Chiquita's companion, who slipped the coins into his sash, and sat down again at the table in front

of the half-emptied jug which he slowly finished, for, having no place in particular to go to, he preferred to stay in the tavern to shivering under the arch of a bridge or the porch of a convent until day, a late comer at that season of the year, should return. There were several other rascals there in the same quandary, and they were snoring, some on benches, some under them, rolled up in their cloaks. The numerous boots that stuck out all over the floor like the feet of dead men on a battlefield, formed a most comical sight. And it was in truth a battlefield, on which those overcome by Bacchus staggered to some dark corner, where they became abominably sick and shed wine instead of blood, while chaffed by their more robust companions.

"By all that is holy!" said Lampourde to Malartic, "that fellow is no cripple, and I shall bear him in mind so as to find him again when I have a difficult job on hand. That knife hurled from a distance is better, in the case of people difficult to approach, than a pistol shot, which makes fire, smoke, and noise, and seems meant to call up the watch."

"True," replied Malartic, "it is a pretty feat and skilfully performed, but if the man happens to miss, he is left disarmed and looks like a fool. For my part,

what took my fancy in that performance and show of dangerous skill was the little girl's coolness. The little beggar is thin as a lath, but she has a lion heart in her tiny body. Then I like her great coal-black, burning eyes and her quietly wan face. Among those bustards, sheldrakes, geese, and other barn-yard fowls, she looks like a young falcon in a hen-roost. I know something about women, and can tell what the flower will be from the bud; Chiquita, as that tawny fellow calls her, will, in two or three years from now, be a morsel fit for a king."

"Or a thief," quietly remarked Jacquemin Lampourde. "And it may be that fate will reconcile these two extremes by making that *moreña*, as the Spaniards say, the mistress of a thief and a prince both. That sort of thing has happened before, and the prince has not always been the favoured lover, so queer and strange are the ways of such women. But let us drop this purposeless discussion and come to serious matters. I may have need, within a short time, of a few stout fellows afraid of nothing to carry out a job I have been offered, but which will not take us as far afield as that which sent the Argonauts in search of the Golden Fleece."

"A rattling fine fleece!" returned Malartic, sticking his nose in his glass, wherein the wine seemed to bubble and seethe at the contact with his incandescent tip.

"It is a pretty complicated and dangerous job," went on the ruffian. "I am directed to put out of the way a certain Captain Fracasse, an actor by trade, who is interfering with the amours of a very great lord. I can manage that part of the business by myself, but I have also to arrange for the abduction of the wench beloved of his lordship and of the actor, and whom her fellows will strive to defend. So let us draw up a list of trusty, unscrupulous friends. What think you of Piquenterre?"

"Excellent," replied Malartic, "but you cannot count on him. He is swinging on Montfaucon, at the end of an iron chain, until such time as his carcass shall be picked clean by the birds, previous to its falling into the gibbet grave, on top of the bones of those of his comrades who have gone before him."

"Now I understand how it is that I have lost sight of him for some time past," put in Lampourde in the coolest manner. "Well, such is life! You have a quiet carouse with a friend in a tavern some night, and

then you each go your way. A week later, when you ask, 'How is so-and-so?' you are told that he has been hanged."

"Alas, yes!" sighed Lampourde's friend, assuming a tragically elegiacal or elegiacally tragic attitude. "As Master de Malherbe says in his consolation to Duperrier:

> "'*He* was of this world, where the saddest fate
> O'ertakes the best of us.'"

"Let us not indulge in lamentations after the manner of women," said the bravo. "Let us display manly and stoical courage, and proceed on our way through life, hat well down and hand on hip, defying the gibbet, which, after all, save as it affects honour, is not much more to be feared than the fire of cannons, stone mortars, culverins, and bombards which soldiers and officers brave, to say nothing of musketry and cold steel. Well, as we cannot have Piquenterre, who must by now be in glory by the side of the repentant thief, let us say Cornebœuf. He is a stout, stocky lad, well-suited to heavy work."

"At this present moment," returned Malartic, "Cornebœuf is travelling along the Moorish coast under the

command of Cadet la Perle. The King honours him so highly that he has had him marked with a fleur-de-lis on his shoulder, so as to be sure of finding him when he wants him. But, on the other hand, Piedgris, Tordgueule, La Rapée, and Bringuenarilles are at liberty and *a la disposicion de usted*."

"These names will be enough; they are those of brave fellows, and you will put me in communication with them when the time comes. Now let us polish off this bottle and get out. This place is becoming more mephitic than Lake Avernus, over which birds cannot fly without being killed by its evil exhalations. It is reeking with garlic, the smell of dirty feet, the stink of filthy bodies, and cart-grease. The fresh night-air will do us good. By the way, where are you putting up to-night?"

"I have not sent my quartermaster ahead to prepare a lodging for me," replied Malartic, "and consequently my tent has not been pitched anywhere. I might go to the Slug Inn, but I have a bill there as long as my sword, and there is nothing so painful to behold on awaking as the sour face of an old host who declines to allow you to incur additional debt and who insists on being paid, while brandishing a bundle of

promissory notes above his head like Jupiter his thunderbolts. The unexpected appearance of a sheriff's officer would be less unpleasant."

"A mere nervous notion; a weakness easily understood, for every great man is troubled in some similar way," said Lampourde, sententiously. "But since you would rather not put up at the Slug Inn, and as the Moonshine Inn is rather chilly in such winter weather as this, I offer you, in antique fashion, hospitality in my aerial den, and the half of my shutter for a bed."

"I accept with the deepest gratitude," answered Malartic. "O thrice and four times blessed the mortal who owns Lares and Penates, and can invite his bosom friend to share his fireside!"

Jacquemin Lampourde had fulfilled the pledge made to himself after the oracle's answer in favour of the tavern; he was drunk as a piper, but no man could carry his liquor so well as he. He mastered the wine, and it never got the better of him. Nevertheless, when he rose, it seemed to him that his legs were heavy as pigs of lead and were sinking into the floor. With a vigorous kick he lifted up his sluggish feet and resolutely walked to the door, his head in the air and his

body very stiff. Malartic followed him steadily enough, for he could not possibly be drunker than he was. Plunge a sponge into the sea after it has been saturated with water, and it cannot take up another drop. That was exactly the case of Malartic, save that the liquid he was full of was the pure juice of the grape, and not water. The two comrades therefore emerged from the inn without coming to grief, and succeeded in hoisting themselves, although anything but angels, up the Jacob's ladder leading from the street to Lampourde's sky-attic.

As they left the tavern it offered a lamentably ridiculous spectacle. The fire was dying out on the hearth; the candles, which there was nobody to snuff, had tremendous stalks and the wicks supported huge charred mushrooms. Stalactites of tallow ran down from them on the candlesticks, where they solidified as they cooled. The smoke from the pipes, the vapour of the dishes, and the breath of the guests had condensed on the ceiling into a heavy fog; to clean the floor it would have been necessary to flush it with a river, as was done with the Augean stables. The tables were littered with broken pieces of food, carcasses, and ham-bones that looked as though they had been torn by the

fangs of carrion-eating mastiffs. Here and there a wine-measure, upset in the course of a row, was spilling what wine was left in it, which, falling into the red pool it had already made, resembled the gouts of blood dropping into a basin from a head cut off, while the regular intermittent sound of the falling beat a sort of rhythmic time to the snoring of the drunkards.

The little Moor of the Marché-Neuf struck four o'clock. The tavern-keeper, who had fallen asleep, his head resting on his crossed arms, woke, cast an inquiring glance round the room, and noting that business had slackened, called his assistants and said to them : —

"It is getting late; chuck these rascals, male and female, out with the swill. They are none of them drinking."

The lads seized their brooms, dashed three or four pails of water about, and in less than five minutes, thanks to a copious recourse to kicks and blows, the tavern had emptied its customers into the street.

XIII

A DOUBLE ATTEMPT

THE Duke de Vallombreuse was not the man to neglect his love affairs any more than the gratification of his vengeance. He bore a deadly hatred to Sigognac, while his passion for Isabella had that character of mad fury which is the outcome, in such proud and violent-tempered men, of the feeling that success is impossible. To force the young actress to yield to his lust had now become the one all-engrossing thought in his mind. Spoiled by the easy conquests he had made in the course of his life of gallantry, he could not understand his being repulsed, and constantly, in conversation, out walking, at the theatre and in church, in town as at Court, he would feel sudden surprise and say to himself, "How comes it that she does not love me?"

And for one who did not believe in virtue in women, and still less in actresses, the wonder the Duke expressed was natural enough. He suspected that Isa-

bella's coldness was deliberately assumed in order to get more out of him, for there is nothing that so excites desire as feigned modesty and an air of shy maiden reserve. On the other hand, the contemptuous manner in which she had returned the jewel box placed in her room by dame Leonardo furnished abundant proof that she was not one of those women who hold off in order to sell themselves at a higher price. No costlier gems would have been of any service; for, since Isabella did not even open the caskets, what mattered it whether they contained pearls and diamonds fit for a queen or not? Nor would love letters have touched her more readily, however remarkable the elegance and fire with which the Duke's secretaries might paint his flame, for Isabella did not open letters of that sort. Prose and verse, then, tirades and sonnets would have simply been wasted. Besides, such languorous methods, which might suit slow-going lovers, did not at all fit in with the Duke de Vallombreuse's masterful ways. He sent for dame Leonardo, with whom he had kept secretly in touch, for it is always well to have a spy in the place, even though it be impregnable. Sometimes the garrison relaxes its watchfulness, a postern gate is quickly opened, and the enemy slips in.

Leonardo was shown up the private stair into the Duke's private room, in which he received his most intimate friends and his most faithful retainers only. It was oblong in shape, wainscotted, the pillars fluted and of the Ionic order, and between them oval frames in rich, luxuriant taste carved in the wood, and apparently suspended from the cornice, itself carved in high relief, by ingeniously intricate gilded love-knots and ribbons. These medallions contained mythological figures, Floras, Venuses, Dianas, Graces, nymphs of the chase and of the woods, which were portraits of the young Duke's mistresses, dressed in Greek fashion and showing, the one, her snowy bosom, another her shapely leg, another a pair of dimpled shoulders, another charms more mysterious, and in every case with such subtle artifice that the paintings seemed due to the artist's fancy, instead of being done from nature. The most prudish among these ladies had, nevertheless, posed for these pictures, which were by Simon Vouet, the greatest master of the day. In doing so, they had fancied they were conferring a unique favour upon the Duke, and had not the least suspicion that their portraits were to form part of a collection.

The ceiling, in the shape of a shell, represented

the toilet of Venus. The goddess, having been attired by her nymphs, was looking at herself in a mirror presented to her by a tall Cupid, past the days of pagehood, to whom the artist had given the Duke's features, but it was plain that the Cupid attracted her more than the mirror. Cabinets inlaid with Florentine agates, crammed with love letters, locks of hair, bracelets, rings, and other tokens of forgotten amours; a table of the same material, the top of which, of black marble, was ornamented with bouquets of flowers in bright colours, diapered with butterflies winged with gems; arm-chairs, the legs turned in ebony, upholstered in salmon-coloured brocatelle with large silver pattern; a thick Smyrna carpet, on which sultanas had perchance sat down, and which had been brought from Constantinople by the French ambassador, — made up the rich and voluptuous furniture of this retreat, which Vallombreuse preferred to the State apartment, and which he generally inhabited.

The Duke condescendingly waved his hand to dame Leonardo, and pointed to a stool on which she might sit. Leonardo was an ideal duenna, and her old yellow wax complexion and repulsive ugliness were brought out startlingly by her present fresh and youthful sur-

roundings. Her black costume, with its jet quillings, and her cap with its falling front made her look respectable at the first glance, but the evil smile that played in the down that shadowed the corners of her lips, the hypocritically lecherous glance of her eyes, ringed with brown, and the sordid, servile, and base expression of her face, soon undeceived one, and it was plain she was no dame Pernelle, but a Mistress Macette; one of the breed that wash young girls for the witches' sabbath and ride away on Saturday nights, a broom between their legs.

"Dame Leonardo," said the Duke, breaking the silence, "I have sent for you to consult with you on the best means of seducing that intractable Isabella, for I know you are remarkably expert in affairs of love, having practised them yourself in the days of your youth and continued them in maturity. A duenna who has been a leading lady must know all the ropes."

"Your Grace," answered the old actress with an air of compunction, "does much honour to my feeble lights, and may be certain that I shall zealously serve your Grace in all your Grace orders."

"I have no doubt of that," returned Vallombreuse, carelessly; "but meanwhile my affairs are no farther

advanced. How is it with that rebellious beauty? Is she still as much in love with her Sigognac?"

"Just as much," replied dame Leonardo with a sigh. "Young people are foolish like that at times. Then Isabella does not seem to be a creature of common mould; no temptation has any hold upon her, and had she been in Eden she would have been capable of not listening to the serpent."

"How comes it, then," cried the Duke angrily, "that that accursed Sigognac has managed to win a hearing from one so deaf to the vows of others? Does he possess any philter, amulet, or talisman?"

"None, my lord. He was merely unhappy, and the greatest happiness of tender, romantic, and proud women like Isabella is to console some one. They prefer to give rather than to receive, and pity, its eyes wet with tears, opens the door to love."

"You are talking nonsense. How can the fact that a man is thin, penniless, ragged, out at elbows, and grotesque explain that he should be loved? The ladies of the Court would laugh at such an idea."

"Naturally enough, for it is not a frequent case, and there are very few women afflicted in that way; but your lordship has fallen upon an exception."

"It is enough to drive one mad to think that such a bumpkin should have triumphed where I have failed, and laughs at my disappointment in his mistress' arms."

"Your Grace is spared that much pain, at all events, for Sigognac does not enjoy his love in the way your Grace means. Isabella's virtue is intact; the passion of these model lovers, although of the liveliest, is strictly platonic and is satisfied with a kiss on the hand or on the forehead. That is the reason their attachment lasts; if it were gratified, it would die out of itself."

"Are you quite sure of what you say, dame Leonardo? You can never make me believe that they go on living together in such chaste fashion, when I know what is the free and easy life of the green-room and travel, when they sleep under the same roof, eat at the same table, and are constantly brought together by the requirements of rehearsals and by-play. They would have to be angels!"

"Isabella *is* an angel, and has not the pride that caused Lucifer to fall from heaven. As for Sigognac, he blindly obeys his mistress, and submits to every sacrifice she imposes upon him."

"In that case, what can you do for me?" said

Vallombreuse. "Come, hunt through the secret corners of your resourceful brain for some old irresistible stratagem, assured trick, or complicated machination that shall insure my triumph. You are aware that gold is nothing to me."

And he plunged his hand, whiter than a woman's and as delicate, in a cup chased by Benvenuto Cellini, that stood on a table near him and that was filled with gold pieces.

At the sound of the tempting clinking of the gold, the duenna's owl-like eyes lighted up, making two luminous holes in the tanned leather of her expressionless face. She appeared to reflect deeply and remained silent for a moment.

Vallombreuse impatiently awaited the result of her meditations. At last the old hag spoke: —

"If I cannot hand over to you her heart, I think I can manage to put you in possession of her body. A wax impression of the lock, a false key and a good dose of opiate would do the business."

"I will have none of that!" cried the Duke, who could not repress a gesture of disgust. "I should be ashamed to possess a sleeping woman, an inert body, dead to feeling, a statue without consciousness, will, or

memory, a mistress who on awakening would gaze upon me with amazement as when emerging from a dream, and would at once return to her hatred for me and her love for another. I shall never sink so low as to be merely a nightmare, a libidinous dream forgotten at morning light."

"Your lordship is right; possession is valueless without consent, and I meant we should resort to that expedient merely if all else failed. I like just as little as your Grace such underhand methods, and the potions which belong rather to the poisoner's pharmacopœia. But, seeing that you are handsome as Adonis, the favourite of Venus, superbly dressed, rich, powerful at Court, in the enjoyment of everything that women delight in, why do you not simply pay your court to Isabella?"

"By my soul! old lady, you are right," cried Vallombreuse, casting a satisfied look at a Venetian mirror supported by two carved Cupids poised upon a gilded arrow, in such a manner that the glass could be inclined backwards or forwards to allow the user to see himself in it more comfortably. "It is all very well for Isabella to be cold and virtuous, she is not blind; and nature has not been so unkind to me that my presence

should disgust her. I can at least strike her as a statue or a painting that one cannot help admiring, even though one does not care for it, but the agreeable colour and form of which retain and charm the gaze. Then I shall speak to her words which women cannot resist, with glances that melt the iciest hearts, and the fire of which, I may say it without conceit, has inflamed the coldest and most hyperborean ladies of the Court. Besides, that actress is proud, and the attentions of a duke must of necessity flatter her vanity. I shall back her in her profession, and cabal in her favour. It is past comprehension that she should then bestow a thought upon that Sigognac, of whom I shall manage to get rid."

"Has your Grace any farther commands for me?" said dame Leonardo, who had risen and stood with her hands crossed on her waist in an attitude of respectful attention.

"No," replied Vallombreuse. "You may go. But before doing so, take this," and he held out to her a handful of gold. "It is not your fault that such an extraordinary sample of virtue should happen to have joined Herod's company."

The hag thanked the Duke and withdrew backwards

to the door without tripping on her skirts, thanks to the practice she had had on the stage. Once outside, she turned round stiffly and rapidly disappeared down the dark staircase.

Left alone, Vallombreuse rang for his man to come and dress him.

"Now, Picard," said the Duke, "you must surpass yourself and dress me in irresistible fashion, for I mean to be handsomer than Buckingham trying to win the good graces of Queen Anne of Austria. If I return empty-handed from my beauty hunt, you shall be soundly thrashed, for I have no defect or vice that requires to be concealed by art."

"Your lordship is the handsomest man on earth, and all art can do for your lordship is to set off nature. If your Grace will be pleased to sit down before the mirror and to remain quiet for a few minutes, I shall dress your lordship in such fashion that no woman could find it in her heart to refuse your Grace anything."

So saying, Picard placed his curling irons into a silver cup in which olive stones, dusted over with ashes, burned as gently as a Spanish brasero, and when they were heated just right, which he ascertained by placing

them close to his cheek, he began pressing the ends of the Duke's beautiful black ringlets, that were willing enough to curl gracefully in spirals.

When his Grace de Vallombreuse's hair was dressed, and his slight mustache, like unto the bow of Cupid, had been pointed with a cosmetic scented more deliciously than balsam, the valet, satisfied with his work, drew back a little to contemplate it, like a painter who gazes with half-closed eyes at the finishing touch he has just given to a picture.

"What dress does your lordship desire to wear today? If I might venture upon a suggestion, though your lordship needs no counsel in such matters, I would propose to your Grace to put on the black velvet, slashed and puffed with satin of the same colour, with silk stockings and a plain collar of Ragusa point lace. Brocade, brocaded satin, gold or silver stuffs and jewels might, by their unnecessary glitter, distract the glance which ought to rest solely on your lordship's face, which has never been more irresistibly charming. Black would set off the delicate pallor due to your Grace's wound, and make him even more interesting."

"The rascal has good taste, and is as apt a flatterer as a courtier," said the Duke to himself. "He is right;

black does become me. Besides, Isabella is not the sort of woman to be dazzled by the shimmer of brocades and the sparkle of diamonds. Picard," continued he aloud, "you may put on me the velvet doublet and trunks, and hand me the burnished steel sword. Now tell La Ramée to have the horses put to the carriage, the four bays, and without loss of time. I shall leave in a quarter of an hour."

Picard vanished at once to carry out his master's orders. Vallombreuse, while waiting for the carriage, walked up and down the room, casting a questioning glance, every time he passed in front of it, at the Venetian mirror, which, contrary to the wont of mirrors, returned a flattering reply to each question.

"That minx will have to be devilishly supercilious, overweening, and hard to please if she does not fall desperately and madly in love with me, in spite of her affectation of virtue and her platonic blandishments with Sigognac. Yes, indeed, my beauty, you shall soon figure in one of these oval frames, painted from life in the character of Phœbe, forced, notwithstanding her coldness, to come and kiss Endymion. You shall take your place among these goddesses, who were at first just as prudish, stand-off, and hyrcanean as you are

now, and who are one and all ladies of much higher rank than you will ever be. It will not be long ere I add your conquest to my roll of fame, for know, you little actress, you, that nothing can withstand the will of a Vallombreuse. My motto is *Frango nec frangor.*"

A lackey entered to announce that the carriage was waiting. The distance from the Rue des Tournelles, where the Duke's residence was situated, to the Rue Dauphine was rapidly covered by the four fast-trotting, vigorous Mecklenburg horses, driven as they were by a coachman proud of belonging to a great house, and who would not have yielded the crown of the causeway to a prince of the blood even, and therefore crowded every other equipage to the wall.

Bold and self-confident though the Duke was, he could not, while on his way, repress a slight anxiety which was quite uncommon in him. The uncertainty he felt as to the manner in which he would be received by the proud Isabella made his heart beat faster than usual. He was torn by conflicting feelings, and passed from hatred to love according as he hoped the young actress would favour his vows or feared she might reject them.

When the fine gilded coach, drawn by costly horses

and laden with lackeys in the liveries of Vallombreuse, drove up to the inn in the Rue Dauphine, the gates were opened wide to admit it, and the innkeeper, cap in hand, tumbled, rather than ran, down the steps to meet the splendid visitor and learn his pleasure.

Quickly though the Boniface had rushed up, Vallombreuse, springing from the coach without making use of the step, was already approaching the front steps at a rapid pace, and his knees almost struck the forehead of the innkeeper bowing low before him. The young Duke, in the short, strident tones habitual to him when excited, said: —

"Mlle. Isabella lives here. I wish to see her. Is she in at present? You need not apprise her of my arrival; just send a servant to show me the way to her room."

Boniface had replied to the questions by bobbing his head respectfully, and now added: —

"I trust your lordship will allow me the honour of guiding your lordship myself; a servant is unworthy of so much honour, and even I, though master here, scarcely merit it."

"As you please," replied Vallombreuse with haughty nonchalance. "Only be quick. There are already

heads sticking out of the windows and craning out to look at me as if I were the Grand Turk or the Alborak."

"I shall precede your lordship and show your lordship the way," said the innkeeper, pressing his cap to his heart with his two hands.

Having ascended the stairs, the Duke and his guide entered a long corridor into which opened doors, as in a convent cloister. On reaching Isabella's room, the host stopped and said: —

"Shall I announce your lordship?"

"You may withdraw now," answered Vallombreuse, putting his hand on the door-key. "I shall announce myself."

Isabella, seated near the window in a high chair, dressed in a morning wrapper, her feet nonchalantly stretched out upon a tapestry footstool, was busy studying the part she was to play in the next piece. Her eyes were closed, so as not to see the lines written on her book, and she was repeating, in schoolboy fashion, the eight or ten lines she had read over several times. The light from the window, bringing out the velvety contours of her profile, starred with gold the loose hair that curled on her neck, and gleamed on the transpar-

ent pearliness of her teeth. The reflected light tempered with its silveriness the deep shadow that enveloped her face and dress, producing that magical effect so much sought after by painters, which they call, in their language, chiaroscuro. The girl thus posed made a lovely picture, that needed only to be reproduced by a skilful man to become the treasure and the gem of a gallery.

Supposing that it was a maid who had entered the room to perform her service, Isabella had not opened her eyes, the long lashes of which looked like golden threads as the light fell upon them, and continued in a dreamy somnolence to repeat her rimes mechanically, just as one tells one's beads almost without thinking. Besides, she entertained no fear, for it was broad day, the inn was full of people, she was close to her companions, and she was not aware that Vallombreuse was in Paris. There had been no new attempts against Sigognac's life, and the young actress, timid though she was, had begun to recover confidence. She believed that her coldness had repelled the Duke, of whom she thought as little at that moment as of Prester John or the Emperor of China.

Vallombreuse had advanced to the centre of the

room, treading lightly and holding in his breath in order not to spoil the lovely picture, upon which he gazed with very natural delight. Waiting until Isabella should look up and perceive his presence, he had knelt on one knee, and held in one hand his hat, the plume of which trailed on the floor, while he pressed the other to his heart in an attitude so respectful that it would have satisfied even a queen.

The young actress was beautiful, but Vallombreuse, it must be owned, was not less handsome. The light fell full upon his face, with its perfectly regular features, resembling that of a young Greek god turned duke since the destruction of Olympus. At this moment, the love and admiration that illumined it had driven away the imperiously cruel expression which occasionally marred it. His eyes were blazing; his lips seemed to be luminous; a sort of rosy light came to his cheeks from his heart; his curled and scented hair shimmered blue like the azure play of light upon polished jet, while his white neck, at once delicate and robust, had the tone of marble. Illumined by passion, he shone, he sparkled, and one could well understand that a duke so made should be convinced that no goddess, queen, or actress was capable of resisting him.

Isabella at last turned her head and saw the Duke de Vallombreuse kneeling close by her. Had Perseus thrust in her face the mask of Medusa, set within his shield and grimacing in agony among a wildering of snakes, she would not have been so smitten with stupor. She remained frozen, petrified, her eyes dilated with terror, her lips parted, her throat dry, unable to move or to call out. The pallor of death spread over her features, and cold sweat broke out upon her. She felt herself fainting, but, by a prodigious effort of the will, she recalled her senses in order not to be left helpless in the hands of the audacious man.

"I must inspire you with the most insurmountable horror," said Vallombreuse, remaining in his position and speaking in his softest tones, "since the mere sight of me produces such an effect upon you. An African lion springing from its den, with red, gaping mouth, sharp teeth, and claws protruding would certainly have caused you less terror. I own that my entrance is somewhat sudden and unexpected, but you must blame my love for my incivility. In order to see you I should have braved your anger, and my adoration, even at the risk of offending you, falls at your feet suppliant and timid."

"I beseech you to rise, my lord," said the young actress. "Your attitude does not beseem you. I am merely a poor strolling player, and my poor charms do not merit your allegiance. Forget a passing fancy, and bear elsewhere desires that so many women would gratify only too gladly. Do not make queens, duchesses, and marchionesses jealous on my account."

"What care I for all or any of them," Vallombreuse answered impetuously as he rose. "It is your pride I adore; your coldness is more attractive to me than the favours of others; your modesty has driven my passion to madness, and you must love me or I die! Be not afraid," he added, as he saw Isabella opening the window as if about to throw herself out in the event of his attempting violence; "all I ask is that you will tolerate my presence, that you will permit me to pay you my court and to endeavour to soften your heart, as the most respectful of lovers."

"Spare me such useless attentions," replied Isabella, "and I shall entertain for you, not love, but boundless gratitude."

"You have neither father, husband, nor lover," said Vallombreuse, "to object to my paying you attentions

and seeking to win your love. My homage is not an insult; why then do you repel me? If you will only consent to receive me, you shall lead the most splendid life. The enchantments of fairyland shall pale by the side of the inventions my love shall light upon to please you. You shall walk on the clouds like a goddess; you shall tread on azure and light alone. Every cornucopia shall outpour its treasures at your feet; you will not have time to formulate a wish, for I shall divine it in your eyes and forestall it. The world well lost shall vanish like a dream, and with united flight we shall ascend through the splendour to Olympus, happier, more beautiful and transported than Love and Psyche themselves. Come, Isabella, do not turn away your head; do not remain mute as death; do not drive to despair a love that can accomplish anything save self-renunciation."

"I cannot share that love, of which any other woman would be proud," modestly replied Isabella. "Even did not virtue, which I prize more dearly than life itself, forbid me, I should still decline so dangerous an honour."

"Pray look on me with a kindly eye," went on Vallombreuse, "and the noblest and greatest among women

shall envy you. To any other woman I would say: 'Take what you please of my castles, my lands; pillage my cabinets full of diamonds and pearls; plunge your arms up to the shoulders into my coffers; dress your menials in costumes too splendid for princes; have the horses of your carriages shod with silver; keep up the style of a queen, and dazzle Paris so difficult to amaze.' Such inducements are beneath the notice of so high-souled a woman as you. But the fact that you have overcome and conquered Vallombreuse, that you have him captive at your chariot wheels, that you may call servant and slave one who has never obeyed, and whom no fetters ever retained, such triumph may perchance touch you."

"So great a prisoner would be too illustrious for me," answered Isabella, "and I would not constrain freedom so precious."

So far the Duke de Vallombreuse had restrained himself and though naturally violent had compelled himself to feigned gentleness, but Isabella's firm and respectful resistance was arousing his anger. He felt that her virtue was re-enforced by love for another, and his jealousy increased his wrath. He stepped towards the young girl, who at once put her hand upon the

window-catch. His features were contracted, he was biting his lips, and the wicked look had returned to his face.

"Why do you not tell the truth," said he in a changed voice, "and own that you are madly in love with Sigognac? That is the true explanation of the virtue of which you make such a show. What is there about that fortunate mortal to fascinate you so? Am I not handsomer, nobler, richer than he, and as young, as clever, and as much in love with you?"

"He has at least one quality you lack," returned Isabella. "He respects the woman he loves."

"Because he loves her not enough," answered Vallombreuse, throwing his arms round Isabella, who was already leaning out of the window, and who uttered a faint cry as she felt the audacious man seize upon her.

At that very moment the door opened, and the Tyrant, with many an exaggerated bow and ducking of the head, entered the room and approached Isabella, whom Vallombreuse, maddened at being thus interrupted in his love pursuits, released at once.

"I beg your pardon, Miss," said the Tyrant, casting a threatening glance at the Duke. "I was not aware

that you were in such good company ; but you see the hour for rehearsal has sounded from every clock, and every one is ready but you."

As if in proof of this, were to be seen through the open door the Pedant, Leander, Scappino, and Zerbina, who formed a group quite sufficient to reassure the threatened modesty of Isabella. For one moment the Duke thought of charging these people sword in hand and driving them away, but he would merely have caused useless scandal. Even if he had killed or wounded two or three of the actors, he would not have benefited his cause ; besides, they were of too low a condition for him to sully his noble hands with their blood. He therefore restrained himself, and bowing with icy coldness to Isabella, who, trembling in every limb, had drawn near her friends, he left the room ; but, on reaching the threshold he turned round, waved his hand, and said, " Au revoir, Miss ! " — a very simple remark, but, in consequence of the tone in which it was uttered, pregnant with dire threats. Vallombreuse's face, a moment since so handsome, had resumed its expression of fiendish perversity, and Isabella could not repress a shudder, although the presence of the players protected her against any attempt on his

part. She felt the anguish which a dove feels as the hawk circles above it in narrower and ever narrower circles.

Vallombreuse returned to his carriage, accompanied by the innkeeper, who expended much superfluous and annoying civility upon his lordship, and ere long the rumbling of wheels announced that the dangerous visitor had at last gone.

Now, here is the explanation of the help that came so opportunely to Isabella. The arrival of the Duke de Vallombreuse in a gilded coach at the inn in the Rue Dauphine had caused a buzz of excitement and admiration throughout the inn, which soon reached the ears of the Tyrant, busy, like Isabella, studying his lines in his room. Sigognac, who had been detained at the play-house for the purpose of trying on a new costume, being absent, the worthy Herod, aware of the evil intentions of Vallombreuse, had made up his mind to keep a good watch on Isabella, and having put his ear to the keyhole, a pardonable piece of indiscretion, had listened to the conversation so fraught with danger, and prepared to intervene when matters reached a crisis. Thus it was his prudence had saved Isabella from the foul attempts of the hateful and perverse Duke.

A DOUBLE ATTEMPT

The day was destined to be stormy. Lampourde, it will be remembered, had received orders from Mérindol to put Captain Fracasse out of the way. The bravo, therefore, was standing sentry on the esplanade upon which rises the bronze statue of the king, waiting for a chance to attack Sigognac, — the latter, in order to return to the inn, having necessarily to cross the Pont-Neuf. Jacquemin had been at his post for more than an hour, blowing on his fingers so that they might not be stiff when the time for action should come, and stamping around in order to keep his feet warm. The weather was cold, and the sun was setting behind the Pont Rouge, beyond the Tuileries, amid crimson clouds. The twilight was failing rapidly, and the number of passers-by had become small.

At last Sigognac appeared, walking hastily, for he was vaguely anxious about Isabella, and was in a hurry to reach his lodging. In his eagerness he did not observe Lampourde, who caught hold of his cloak and snatched it off with so sharp a pull that the cords broke, and in a twinkling Sigognac found himself wearing his doublet only. Without attempting to rescue his mantle from his assailant's hands, though at first he took the man for an ordinary thief, he flashed out his sword as

quick as lightning and fell on guard. Nor had Lampourde been less swift in drawing. He was pleased with Sigognac's position and said to himself, "We are going to have some fun." The blades met, and after a little preliminary skirmishing, Lampourde tried a lunge that was immediately parried. "A good parry, that," he again remarked to himself. "The young fellow has been well grounded."

Sigognac bound the bravo's blade with his sword and lunged in flanconade, the ruffian parrying by drawing back his body; admiring the while his opponent's thrust, which was perfect and accurate.

"This for you," cried he, and his sword flashed in a circle, but met Sigognac's, for the latter had already resumed his guard.

Watching for an opening, the blades, engaged by the points, twisted round each other, sometimes slowly, sometimes rapidly, with alternate daring and prudence that testified to the skill of the combatants.

"Do you know, sir," said Lampourde, unable to longer restrain his admiration of Sigognac's assured, accurate, and close play, "do you know that your method is superb?"

"It is at your service," returned Sigognac, lunging

home so fiercely that the bravo had to parry with the pommel of his sword with a twist of the wrist as sharp as the release of the spring of a cross-bow.

"A splendid thrust," said the bravo, growing more and more enthusiastic. "A marvellous thrust! By rights I ought to be a dead man; I am distinctly in the wrong. My parry was a scratch one, out of rule, barbarous, and to be tolerated only as a last resort to avoid being spitted. I almost blush at having used it against so fine a swordsman as you are."

All this talk was intermingled with the clashing of the blades, lunges in quarte, in tierce, double feints, cuts over, and disengagements which heightened Lampourde's admiration of Sigognac. There was nothing in the world the bravo cared for in comparison with the science of fencing, and the respect he felt for any one depended on the man's skill with the sword. Sigognac was growing tremendously in his estimation.

"Would it be indiscreet on my part, sir, to inquire who was your teacher? Girolamo, Paraguantes, and Steelsides would be proud of such a pupil as you."

"My only teacher was an old soldier called Peter," replied Sigognac, amused by this strange conversation.

"There, parry that one; it was one of his favourite thrusts," went on the Baron, lunging.

"The devil!" cried Lampourde. "You nearly pinked me; your point went right under my arm. If it had been daylight, you would have run me through, but you are not yet accustomed to night work which calls for a cat's sight. Never mind, it was admirably done; you straightened out well and lunged superbly. Now look out; I am not going to take you unprepared; I am going to try against you my own private secret thrust, the result of my studies, the *nec plus ultra* of my art, my elixir of life. Up to this time that infallible lunge has invariably killed my man. If you succeed in parrying it, I shall teach it to you. It is the only thing I have to leave, and I shall bequeath it to you. Otherwise I should carry away that sublime thrust into the grave with me, for as yet I have met no one capable of using it, save possibly yourself, you wonderful young fellow! But would you not like to take a rest and draw breath for a moment?"

And as he spoke, Lampourde lowered the point of his sword. Sigognac did the same, and shortly afterwards the duel was resumed.

After a few passes, Sigognac, who was up to every

trick in fencing, perceived, by the way Lampourde was feinting, his sword avoiding Sigognac's with dazzling rapidity, that the famous lunge was about to put in an appearance. He was right: the bravo suddenly sank to the ground as if he had fallen on his face, and the Baron saw no opponent in front of him; but a lightning stroke, cutting in with a hiss, flashed so swift towards him that he had just time to parry with a circular half-parade that broke Lampourde's sword clean in two pieces.

"If the other portion of my sword is not sticking in your belly," said Lampourde to Sigognac as he rose to his feet and shook the remnant in his hand, "you are a great man, a hero, a god!"

"It is not," answered Sigognac. "I am unhurt, and if I pleased I could pin you to the wall like a screech-owl, but that would be repugnant to my feelings; and besides, you have greatly entertained me with your queer ways."

"Baron, allow me henceforth to be your admirer, your slave, your dog. I was paid to kill you. I had even received part of the money in advance, and I spent it. Never mind. I shall rob somebody and return it."

Whereupon he picked up Sigognac's cloak, placed it on the Baron's shoulders as an obsequious valet might have done, bowed low to him, and went off.

The Duke de Vallombreuse's two attempts had failed.

XIV

LAMPOURDE'S SCRUPULOUSNESS

IT is easy to imagine the fury of the Duke de Vallombreuse after the check inflicted upon him by the virtuous Isabella, who had herself been succoured in so timely a fashion by the intervention of her friends. When he returned to his residence, white with concentrated rage, his appearance made his people's teeth chatter and a cold sweat of coming trouble break out all over them; for his natural cruelty indulged, when he was thus exasperated, in Nero-like fury against the first unhappy wretch that came to hand. The Duke de Vallombreuse was not an easy man to get along with, even when he was in a good temper, but when he was the opposite, it would have been safer to come suddenly upon a hungry tiger on a narrow bridge thrown across a torrent. On this occasion he slammed behind him every door that opened before him, with a violence that nearly threw them off their hinges and brought the gilding of the ornaments down in flakes.

On reaching his room he cast his beaver to the ground so roughly that the crown flattened out and the feather was broken short off. To relieve himself, he tore open his doublet, regardless of the diamond buttons that rolled over the floor in every direction. The lace of his shirt was soon reduced to the state of lint, so fiercely did he tear at it, and with one kick he sent flying an arm-chair that he stumbled upon in his angry pacing back and forth, for he vented his wrath even on inanimate objects.

"The impudent creature!" he exclaimed as he raged up and down. "I am minded to have her taken up by the police and pitched into a dungeon, whence she should emerge only after having been whipped and had her head shaved, and then be sent to a hospital or to a convent for reformed women. I should have no difficulty in obtaining the necessary warrant; but her constancy would become only more obdurate, and her love for Sigognac would be increased by all the hatred she would bear me. That plan will not work; but what am I to do?"

And on he stormed again through the room like a wild beast in its cage, but unable to tire out his powerless rage.

While he was thus fuming and foaming, paying no attention to the flight of the hours, that keep on with steady pace whether we be joyous or the reverse, night had come on, and Picard, though he had not been called, took it on himself to enter and light the tapers, being anxious that his master should not get gloomier in the dark, which is the source of sombre humours.

And indeed, as if the effect of the lights had been to clear his brain, Vallombreuse, distracted by his passion for Isabella, remembered his hatred of Sigognac.

"By the way; how is it that that accursed sprig of nobility has not yet been done away with?" said he, stopping short in his walk. "I had given strict orders to Mérindol to kill him himself, or to secure the aid of some bravo, cleverer and braver than he, if he could not do the job himself. 'Kill the brute and it can't bite,' is sound sense, in spite of what Vidaline says. Once Sigognac is gone, Isabella is at my mercy, trembling with terror and freed from a fidelity that has no longer any object. I have no doubt that she is keeping on that fool with the idea of making him marry her, and that is the reason she indulges in that affectation of maidenly modesty and unconquerable virtue, and repels the love of the handsomest of dukes as though

he were a dirty vagrant. Once she is alone, I can master her quickly enough, and in any event I shall have been avenged upon that insolent fellow, who ran me through the arm, and whom I constantly find intervening between me and the fulfilment of my wishes. Come, let me have Mérindol up, and ascertain the condition of things."

Mérindol, summoned by Picard, appeared before the Duke more ghastly than a thief being led to the hanging, his temples bathed in perspiration, his throat dry, and his tongue clogged. It would have been a good thing for him just then to have had a pebble in his mouth, like Demosthenes, the Athenian orator, when he was haranguing the sea, in order to moisten his mouth, to facilitate his delivery, and to loosen his tongue; for the young nobleman's aspect was more threatening than ever was that of the sea or any assembly of the people on the Agora. The poor devil, doing his best to stand up on his shaky legs, that knocked together as though he were drunk, notwithstanding that what he had imbibed since the morning would not have harmed a fly, kept twisting his hat in front of him with the most idiotic look of helplessness. He dared not lift his eyes to those of his master, whose

glance he felt upon him like a douche alternately boiling hot and ice-cold.

"Well, you brute," said Vallombreuse suddenly, "how long are you going to stand there with that hang-dog look of yours, as if you already felt round your neck the hempen cravat which you deserve even more for your cowardice and your blundering than for your misdeeds?"

"I was awaiting your lordship's orders," said Mérindol with a feeble attempt at a smile. "Your Grace is aware that I am devoted to your lordship even to the length of being hanged. I venture upon this joke because of the gracious allusion your lordship has just —"

"That will do," interrupted the Duke. "Did I not order you to rid me of that accursed Sigognac, who is constantly traversing my plans and annoying me? You have not done it, for Isabella's joy and serenity made it quite plain to me that the scoundrel still lives and that I have not been obeyed. Much use it is to have ruffians in one's pay when this is the way they serve you! You ought, without my needing to speak, to divine my wishes by the flash of my eyes or the fluttering of my lids, and to slay quietly whoever offends me.

But you are fit only to gorge yourselves in the kitchen, and you are brave only when chickens have to be killed. If you go on in this way, I shall hand you all back to the executioner who is on the look-out for you, you cowardly scoundrels, you white-livered rogues, you blundering assassins, dregs of the galleys and a reproach to them!"

"I observe with pain that your Grace does injustice to the zeal and, if I may venture to say so, to the talent of your Grace's faithful servants; but that man Sigognac is not the sort of common game that can be hunted down and killed in a few minutes. At our first attempt he was within an ace of cutting me down to the chin, and he would have, had he wielded anything else than a stage sword, blunted and dulled, luckily for me. A second ambush found him on his guard, and so perfectly prepared to defend himself stoutly that my comrades and myself were compelled to slink away without risking a useless combat in which help would have come to him and that would have caused an unpleasant exposure. Now he knows my face, and I could not possibly approach him without his instantly drawing upon me. I have therefore been obliged to have recourse to a friend of mine, a

bravo, and the best swordsman in Paris, who is on the watch for him and will despatch him, under cover of stealing his cloak, on the first opportunity by twilight or at night, without your Grace's name being mentioned in the matter, as would not have failed to be the case had we, who are in your lordship's service, done the trick."

"Not a bad plan," replied Vallombreuse, now somewhat mollified, in a careless tone, "and it is as well that the affair should be disposed of in that way. But can you trust the courage and the skill of the fellow? It will take a brave man to kill Sigognac, who is no coward, as I do not mind owning, though I hate him, since he dared stand up to me."

"Oh!" replied Mérindol, with an accent at once self-satisfied and assured, "Jacquemin Lampourde is a hero — gone wrong. His valour surpasses that of the Achilles of fable and of the Alexanders of history. He is not without reproach, but he is without fear."

Picard, who for a few minutes past had been moving about the room, observing that Vallombreuse was now in a better temper, ventured to inform him that a rather queer-looking character was earnestly seeking to see him on a matter of importance.

"Show the rascal up," said the Duke; "but woe to him if he turns out to have disturbed me for nothing. In that case I shall have him thrashed in such fashion that he will never have a whole skin again."

The valet went out in order to bring up the newcomer, and Mérindol was discreetly withdrawing when the entrance of a peculiar individual rooted him to the floor. He had good reason to feel astonished, for the man brought up to Vallombreuse by Picard was none other than Jacquemin Lampourde in person. His unexpected presence in such a place evidently meant that something strange and unforeseen had occurred. Mérindol was therefore very much troubled when he saw, appearing thus before his master, and without any intermediary, the subordinate agent, the subaltern whose work was to have been done in darkness.

Jacquemin Lampourde himself, however, did not seem in the least abashed. Indeed, when he stepped into the room he had winked at Mérindol in a friendly way, and he now stood a few steps in front of the Duke, his face brilliantly lighted by the flame of the tapers which brought out every detail of his marked features. His forehead, on which the pressure of the beaver had left a red mark, like a cicatrised wound,

showed by the drops of sweat, not yet dry, that the bravo had either walked fast or had been taking some violent exercise. His eyes, of a bluish-gray with metallic gleams, were fixed with such quiet impudence upon the Duke that Mérindol shivered. As for his nose, the shadow of which covered the whole of one cheek, as the shadow of Ætna covers up a great part of Sicily, its fleshy mass broke grotesquely his strange and monstrous profile, gilded on the edges by a bright ray of light in which it shone again. His mustaches, stiffened with some cheap cosmetic, looked like a spit run through his upper lip, while his chin tuft curled up like an inverted comma. The combination made up a most singular face, of the kind that Jacques Callot loved to draw in his own original and striking way.

His costume consisted of a buff jerkin, gray trunks, and a scarlet mantle, from which the gold galloons appeared to have been recently taken off, bands of brighter colour showing on the partially faded stuff. A sword with heavy shell-hilt was suspended from a broad brass-bound belt, drawn tight round the man's small but muscular waist. Mérindol was much exercised over the peculiar fact that Lampourde had in his hand, which with his arm stuck out from under his

cloak like a sconce projecting from a wall, a purse the rounded shape of which indicated that it held a respectable sum of money. The gesture of offering money, instead of taking it, was so utterly foreign to master Jacquemin's moral and physical habits that he performed it with an emphatic, solemn, and stiff awkwardness that was most comical to behold. Then the notion of Jacquemin Lampourde approaching the Duke de Vallombreuse as if he proposed to reward him for some service rendered, was so monstrously beyond all probability that it caused Mérindol to open his eyes at their widest, while his mouth assumed the shape of a saucer, which, according to painters and physiognomists, is the highest expression of the greatest astonishment.

"Well, you scoundrel," said the Duke after taking a good look at the extraordinary figure before him, "is it your intention to bestow alms upon me? And is that why you are sticking that purse under my nose with that long arm of yours which might answer to hang a tavern sign from?"

"To begin with, my lord Duke," answered the bravo, after having imparted to the long lines that marked his cheeks and the corners of his mouth a sort of nervous contraction, "with due deference to your

Highness, I am not called scoundrel, but Jacquemin Lampourde, swordsman. My profession is an honourable one; I have never disgraced myself by manual labour or the practice of any trade or business. Even when at the lowest ebb I have not blown glass, a business which does not involve loss of rank, since it is a perilous one, and the common ruck of men do not much care to face death. I kill for a living, risking my skin and my neck, for I always work alone and warn every man before attacking him, having a horror of treachery and cowardice. Is there anything more manly? Your Grace will therefore be kind enough to withdraw the expression 'scoundrel,' which I can overlook only if it be used in a friendly, joking way. Otherwise it offends too deeply the ticklish delicacy of my self-love."

"Very good, Master Jacquemin Lampourde; it is withdrawn, since you wish it," replied the Duke de Vallombreuse, who, in spite of himself, was amused at the queer formalism of a rascal so nice on the question of language. "Now, be kind enough to explain to me what business brings you here, purse in hand and clinking your cash as a jester his cap and bells or a miser his snappers."

Jacquemin, gratified by the concession made to his sensitiveness, bowed his head, the remainder of his person remaining stiff, and performed with his beaver a number of passes that, in his opinion, combined the soldier's manly freedom with the obsequiousness of the courtier.

"This is the way of it, my lord Duke. I received from Mérindol part payment in advance for the purpose of putting out of the way a certain Sigognac, alias Captain Fracasse. Circumstances over which I had no control have made it impossible for me to execute the order, and as I carry on my profession on honest lines, I have brought back to the owner the money I have failed to earn."

So saying, he placed the purse on a corner of the handsome table inlaid with Florence agates, with a gesture not lacking in dignity.

"I see," said Vallombreuse; "you are another specimen of those braggarts fit only to strut on the boards; men who burst open doors that stand wide open, soldiers of Herod whose valour is displayed against children at the breast, and who take to their heels when their victim shows its teeth; asses covered with a lion skin and whose roar is a bray. Come, own up; Sigognac scared you."

"Jacquemin Lampourde has never been afraid of any man," replied the bravo in a tone that, notwithstanding his eccentric appearance, had much nobility in it; "and I say it without rodomontade or boastfulness after the manner of the Spaniards and the Gascons. Never has any adversary of mine seen my back; I am unknown on that side of me, and I might be, for aught any one knows to the contrary, as humpbacked as Æsop. Those who have seen me at work are aware that I hate easy jobs; I love danger and am as much at home in it as a fish in water. I attacked the Sigognac gentleman *secundum artem*, with one of my best Toledo blades, one of the elder Alonzo de Sahagun's."

"What happened, then," said the young Duke, "in that single combat, in which you appear to have had the worse of it, since you have come here to return your pay?"

"In duels, encounters, and assaults, whether against one or many opponents, I have laid out thirty-seven men who never rose again. I leave out of count those who were more or less dangerously crippled or wounded. But this man Sigognac is as safe behind his defence as if he were in a tower of brass. I made use of every

resource of the art against him: feints, surprises, disengagements, retirings, unusual thrusts, but he had a parry and a riposte for each and every one. And, in addition, such a combination of strength and speed! such boldness joined to such prudence! such perfect coolness! such complete self-control! He is not a man, he is a god with a sword in his hand. At the risk of getting run through I went on enjoying more and more his close, accurate, and superb performance. I had at last an opponent worthy of me; yet, as it was time to bring matters to a conclusion, after having prolonged the fight as much as possible in order to have leisure to admire his splendid method, I took my time and treated him to the Neapolitan's secret thrust which I alone in this world possess, since Girolamo, who bequeathed it to me, is now dead. Besides, there is no one else capable of using it perfectly, and its success depends upon that. I lunged home so clean that Girolamo himself could not have done better. Well, my lord, that devil of a Captain Fracasse, as you call him, parried with astounding velocity and with so strong a reverse parade that he left in my hand merely a stump of my blade, which I kept brandishing like an old woman threatening a boy with a soup ladle. There,

you can see for yourself how my gentleman served my Sahagun."

And Jacquemin Lampourde unsheathed, with a pitiful look, the stump of a rapier bearing the mark of the crowned "S," and made the Duke notice the clean, sharp break.

"Now, it is a prodigious stroke that did that," went on the bravo; "and it might well have been dealt by Roland's Durandal, the Cid's Tisona, or Amadis of Gaul's Hauteclaire. I frankly confess that to kill Captain Fracasse is beyond my powers. Until now there has been but one parry known for that thrust, the worst of all parries, the body parry. Every man who has received that thrust has had an extra buttonhole pinked into his doublet, and his soul has gone out that way. Further, the captain, like all truly brave men, proved merciful. He had me at his mercy, pretty well bewildered and amazed at my failure; he could have spitted me like a garden-warbler, merely by extending his arm, and he refrained; which was exceedingly generous on the part of a gentleman assaulted at dusk, right on the Pont-Neuf. I am indebted to him for my life, and although I do not attach much value to it, nevertheless I am bound to him by gratitude. I shall

undertake nothing further against him; he is sacred, so far as I am concerned. Besides, even if I were skilful enough to get the better of him, I should refrain from wounding or killing so splendid a swordsman, especially as men of his ability are becoming more and more rare in these days of commonplace slashers who hold their swords as if they were broomsticks. Therefore it is that I have come to inform your lordship not to count on me in future. I might have kept the money by way of compensation for the risks and perils I ran, but my conscience revolted at the thought."

"By every devil in hell! take that money back like a flash!" said Vallombreuse in a tone that brooked no refusal, "or I shall have you and it chucked out of the window without the trouble of opening the sash. I never in my life met so conscientious a rascal. You, Mérindol, would never have been capable of so fine an act, which ought to be included in those set as patterns to youth."

Then, seeing that the bravo hesitated, he added: —

"I present you with these pistoles to drink to my health with."

"That, your Grace, I shall most faithfully do," returned Lampourde, "and I trust your lordship

will not object to my gambling with a portion of them."

With these words he stepped towards the table, extended his bony arm, seized the purse with the dexterity of a prestidigitator, and caused it to disappear as if by magic in the depths of his pocket, where it clinked with a metallic sound as it struck a dice-box and a pack of cards. It was plain that this gesture was much more natural to him, so easy was it.

"I withdraw from the business so far as Sigognac is concerned," said Lampourde, "but if your Grace desires it, it will be undertaken by my *alter ego*, the Chevalier Malartic, to whom the most difficult enterprises may be confided, for he is a remarkably clever man. He has the brains to plan and the hand to execute; and besides, I know no one so thoroughly free from prejudice and superstition. I had blocked out, for the purpose of abducting the actress in whom your Grace is interested, a rough plan which he will carry out with the finished and perfect attention to details that is characteristic of him. I can tell you that more than one author whose dramatic combinations win applause on the stage ought to consult Malartic, if he wants to excel in subtlety of plot, invention of strata-

gems, and smooth working of every part. Your lordship could not pick out a better man, and I am really bestowing a prize upon your lordship. Mérindol, who knows him, can bear witness to his remarkable talent. But I must not longer trespass upon your Grace's time. Only, when your lordship has determined to have the business proceeded with, all that will be necessary will be to send a man to chalk up a cross on the left-hand pillar of the Crown and Radish. Malartic will understand, and will come, duly disguised, to Vallombreuse House to receive his final orders and make sure that everything shall work properly."

Having finished his eloquent discourse, master Jacquemin Lampourde performed with his beaver the same evolutions he had gone through when saluting the Duke at the beginning of the conversation, rammed it down upon his head, pulled the brim down over his eyes, and left the room slowly and majestically, very much satisfied with the deportment and eloquence he had exhibited in the presence of so great a nobleman.

His queer figure and equally queer ways, less extraordinary, however, at that time of eccentrics and bravoes than it would have been at any other period, had enter-

tained and interested the young Duke de Vallombreuse. The orginality of Jacquemin Lampourde's character, a man honest according to his lights, was far from being displeasing to him, and he even forgave him for not having succeeded in killing Sigognac. The Baron must be really invincible, since he had got the better of this professional gladiator, and the shame of having been wounded by him was so far diminished. Then, mad as Vallombreuse was, the thought of procuring the murder of Sigognac now struck him as rather outrageous, not because his conscience was tender or sensitive, but because his enemy was a nobleman; for he would not have scrupled to have caused to be slain and assassinated half a dozen townsmen, if they happened to be in his way; the blood of such rabble having no more value in his eyes than the water flowing from so many fountains. He would have preferred to despatch his rival himself, but for Sigognac's superiority as a swordsman, a superiority which his scarcely healed arm well remembered; so that he dared not risk, even under favourable circumstances, another duel or an armed assault upon him.

His thoughts, therefore, were turned to the abduction of Isabella, a plan that attracted him the more in con-

sequence of the amorous prospect it opened up to his imagination. He did not for a moment doubt that once the young actress was parted from Sigognac and her friends, she would become more humane and would yield to the fascination exercised by so handsome a duke, with whom the greatest ladies at Court were over head and ears in love. Vallombreuse's conceit was incurable, precisely because it was so well founded. It justified all his pretensions, and when he boasted most impertinently he merely spoke the truth. So, in spite of the check recently inflicted upon him by Isabella, the young lord felt that there was neither sense nor reason in her not loving him.

"Just let me have her," he said to himself, "for a few days in some retreat from which she cannot escape, and I shall surely master her. I shall be so tender, so passionate, so persuasive, that she herself will speedily wonder how she could have resisted me so long. I shall see her moved, changing colour, casting down her long lashes at sight of me, and hiding her head on my shoulder when I take her in my arms, to conceal her shame and confusion. Between her kisses she will tell me she always did love me, and that her resistance was meant only to inflame my desires; or else

that it was due to the timidity and fearfulness of a mortal pursued by a god; and such other charming nothings which women know so well, even the most chaste among them, to say on such occasions. But once I have possessed her, soul and body, then indeed I shall avenge myself on her for her former avoidance of me!"

THÉOPHILE
GAUTIER

BORN - 1811
DIED - 1872